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THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

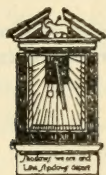
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THE
ELEMENTS *of* STYLE

AN INTRODUCTION
TO LITERARY CRITICISM

BY
DAVID WATSON RANNIE, M.A.

Author of "Wordsworth and his Circle"



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Λέγω δὲ . . . λέξιν εἶναι τὴν διὰ τῆς ὀνομασίας ἐρμηνείαν, ὃ καὶ ἐπὶ
τῶν ἐμμέτρων καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν λόγων ἔχει τὴν αὐτὴν δύναμιν.

—ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, vi. 18.

Τὸ δὲ κυριώτατον, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τινα τῶν ἐν λόγοις ἐπὶ μὴ
τῇ φύσει οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἡμᾶς ἢ παρὰ τῆς τέχνης ἐκμαθεῖν δεῖ.

—LONGINUS, ii.

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PREFACE

THIS book will, I hope, speak for itself; and, in any case, it is not, I think, likely to be assisted by any prefatory words, whether of recommendation or deprecation. But I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to many givers of help, criticism, and encouragement; especially to Mr. Sidney Smith, B.A., late Scholar of Queen's College, Cambridge, whose help was invaluable at various stages of the work; and to Mr. J. H. Fowler, of Clifton College, who very kindly read the proofs and made suggestions, most of which I have gladly followed. I wish also to thank my publishers, to whom I owe the index, as well as the analytical table of contents in its present form.

D. W. R.

WEST HAYES, WINCHESTER.

September 1915.

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THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF STYLE

WHAT is the meaning of Style in literature? The word is constantly on our lips, and therefore it is desirable that we should know clearly what we mean by it. So seldom has such clearness of meaning been sought for hitherto, that it is probably hopeless to make a definition which will satisfy everybody. Everybody has his or her own notion of Style, and inevitably, therefore, his or her own notion as to the proper words in which to clothe it.

In so far as the notion of Style has had a history, the history is a curious one. There have been attempts to make a science of Style; but they have been broken and ineffective. The Greeks and Romans, for whom public speaking had a greater dignity than it has for us, and on the whole a greater importance than written prose composition, made a science, concerned mainly with public speech, which they called Rhetoric; and, under that name, the science has had a fitful and feeble life from days before Aristotle to the nineteenth century, holding a strong conventional position in medieval education. Of the fitfulness and feebleness there are many causes; but the chief one is the

failure of the so-called Rhetoric to abandon the name, and extend itself, frankly and explicitly, under a new name from spoken to written speech, and over poetry and prose alike. The new name is Style.

If we attempt to define Style in such a way as to help knowledge rather than to provoke controversy, we ought to make the definition as large and general as possible. Now if, with this intent, we look carefully into the matter, we find, I think, that Style is only another word for *expression*, and that expression in literature means *the translation of thought into language*. This definition, this identification of Style with expression, if it be sound, certainly does not fail in width and generality. For whatever concerns language, considered as the medium or the vehicle or the garment or the stamp (if we wish to use metaphor) of certain processes of thought, concerns Style.

However Style is defined (and perhaps the majority of readers have never even thought of defining it), there is no doubt as to the widespread belief in the existence and power of something so called. We not only constantly speak of the style of an individual writer or orator, of an age, or of a nation, but we intend by those words to convey a very strong, though it may be a vague, impression.

It is probable that such a definition of Style as has just been given does not, owing to its generality, correspond to the preconceived ideas of most people on the subject. To many, perhaps to most, people Style stands for a quality of expression rather than for expression itself; it is an ornament or decoration of a composition, rather than the living tissue of which the composition is made. Style is often spoken of as if it meant good or distinguished style: thus it is often said that an author has *no style*, when it is

meant that he has a bad or a dull style. Nor is this use of the word a mere colloquialism. Thus we find Matthew Arnold writing as follows: "Every one who has any sense for these things feels the subtle turn, the heightening, which is given to a poet's verse by his genius for style." By most readers these words will be understood to imply that a genius for, or power of, style is an added grace, which even a great poet may lack without failing in his vocation. This is certainly to narrow very much the scope of the word, and to make it difficult of definition.

There are two prevalent ideas about Style which ought to be carefully considered.

(1) Many people think that Style, though a matter of quality of great importance, is incapable of analysis or explanation. This idea is intimately connected with the view to which we have just referred, namely, that Style is a quality which gives distinction to certain writers or compositions. If Style were only idiosyncrasy, or the literary accent of a school, a nation, or an age, it might well be something which we could recognise when we saw or heard it, but of which we could give no rational account or analysis. But if Style be the whole of expression, it seems evident that at least a great deal of it can be made the subject of exposition and analysis. For expression is attained by means of words; and every literary composition is a concrete whole made up of concrete parts, with a method which may be sought and at least partially found; an adjustment of means to ends which, however instinctive in the author, may at all events in many respects be pointed out as clearly to the student as any mechanical or organic process.

(2) It is often held that Style belongs to the externals of

literature, and is therefore a matter of subordinate or petty interest. People are fond of exalting the theme of a work above its treatment, its matter at the expense of its form. When a point of Style is raised, one often hears it said by those who are by no means without the power of literary appreciation: *Let us pay heed to what is said, and care little how it is said!* And in this attitude they fortify themselves, perhaps, by pointing to works impressive and famous by their thought, but cumbrous and repelling by their style.

In judging of the merit of this attitude, several important questions must be kept in view. In the first place, the word "external," when it is applied to Style, is used metaphorically; and we can never reach the fundamental truth about anything until we have pressed beyond metaphor to that which metaphor signifies or represents. Few words are more dangerous than external and internal when they are used metaphorically. In relation to thought and language, the only matters with which Style is concerned, they are apt to mislead seriously. Very little reflection convinces us that in such matters there are really no inside and outside at all. When we speak of Style as an external matter, we can (at the most) only mean that we regard thought as arising in the mind anteriorly to, and independently of, language, and as capable of appraisement apart from language. Whether and to what extent this is a tenable theory is a question for philosophers rather than for literary critics. But those who speak of Style as external may mean a good deal less than this. They may waive profound and fundamental questions about thought and language, and mean only that literary expression is a complex matter involving many operations; and that some at least of those opera-

tions are performed deliberately, and subsequently to the genesis of the thought which they help to put before the reader. Those who mean only this seem to be certainly right. Literary expression is complex; much of it may be deliberate and the result of careful and repeated choice; much of it may be taught and learned; much of it may be elaborated long after the birth and even the maturity of the thought which it expresses.

But, however true this may be, it makes a reason, not for the depreciation of Style, but for its careful study. Style we have seen is *posterior* rather than external to thought; and posteriority, unlike externality, carries no innuendo of inferiority. The interest of Style need not be petty because Style is complex and the result of careful choice and elaboration: the presumption rather is that it must be the reverse of petty. And it may be added that the more carefully we look at the many elements of Style, the less we shall be inclined to pass any of them by as petty. We shall indeed feel that there is graduation among them, that they are of unequal importance. We shall feel, for example, that a good choice of epithets and a grammatical and logical syntax are much more important than the presence or absence of figures of speech or of slangy colloquialisms; and that these, in turn, are more important than the perfect arrangement, balance, and finish of the whole work, and much more important than punctuation or the relevancy of title. And yet, even in such relatively small matters as punctuation and choice of title, far-reaching issues are involved. Punctuation, whatever stops may be used, and whether they are put in by the author or the printer, is the outward and visible sign of an inward logic which is of the very essence of the work. And as to choice

of title, one has only to think of the phrase, *Modern Painters*, of its lack of impressiveness in sense and sound, of its controversial origin, and of its small relevancy to the great discursive treatise on the principles of art of which it is the indestructible name—of its irremediable inadequacy—in order to feel that in devising and persisting in such a title, Ruskin, great master of style as in many respects he was, hindered the effectiveness of his work and made a failure in style.

When we have realised that Style is concerned with nothing less than the whole of expression, and that it is neither wholly incapable of analysis nor unworthy of it, we may still be justified in asking the question: Wherein lies the real importance of the study? And it is necessary to answer the question with great care.

To begin with, we may admit that the practical importance of the study is small, if we use the word practical in its most vulgar sense. In that sense, those studies only are practical which immediately help the student to do something which he wants to do. In that sense, the study of Style could be considered of great practical importance only if the analysis of expression inevitably taught the student how to express himself as the best writers express themselves.

Now it is very doubtful whether the most wisely guided and most thorough study of Style can do this for the student.

While a very great part of expression can be analysed and explained, the parts separated by the analysis are, in works of literary art, presented, not separately, but held together in a synthesis and balance—they appear as many in one; and this synthesis and balance, this unity in

plurality, is the result of an intellectual operation to which only the writer may be competent, and which cannot be acquired by any study. The whole of expression, the whole of style, cannot be analysed or explained. We may help ourselves to realise this by comparing literary with facial expression. In the expression of every face there is much that can be analysed and explained. There are the parts played by the different features; there are the complexion, colour of eyes, frequency and character of smile, and what not. But besides all these, there is something, an informing mystery which cannot be separated or named, our ignorance of which we indicate by the unsatisfactory word *individuality*. Nearly all we know about the individuality either of a human face or of a literary style, is that it cannot be reproduced. Yet, while all this is quite true; while no one can reasonably hope to learn the art of good expression merely by the close study of models of Style, it is certain that such study goes a good long way in the direction of helping the student towards the acquirement of good style. Not only are many of the processes of expression—*e.g.* the choice of words, the habit of correct grammar—the result of deliberate choice and therefore capable of being learned; but there is, so to say, an infectiousness in style; there is a tendency, of which every student is conscious, to learn some at least of the literary habits of the writers studied. Just as the study of vulgar writers tends, as we all know it does tend, to produce vulgar writing, so, fortunately, the study of noble writers does tend to produce noble writing.

The real importance of the study of Style, however, is not practical but scientific. In other words, we ought to study not with the aim of learning to do something, but with the aim of learning to know something. The scientific

importance of the study of Style can hardly be over-estimated. For what is it that it helps us to know? When we think of all that literary expression is and means, we shall come to see that the study of Style is really the study of literature itself; and that only by understanding Style, by distinguishing its processes and methods, and taking note of its failures and triumphs, can we know literature. If this seems paradoxical, it must be either because we have not considered the matter closely enough, or because we do not believe that Style means the whole of expression. If we regard Style as a mere grace or flavour added to literary expression by the individual author or by the fashion of a period, it would of course be absurd to say that to study such a thing is to study literature itself. But if, as we look closely into the woven tissue of a composition, we see, as we can hardly help seeing, that from among the many processes and elements which make it what it is we have really neither warrant nor power to select one or a few and call it or them "Style," if we cannot resist the conclusion that all are parts of Style, then the scientific importance of the study is self-evident. We must believe that whatever value belongs to the minute and exhaustive study of literature belongs to the study of Style. The adjectives here are important; because we may, of course, get much pleasure and benefit from literature, we may get mental refreshment, suggestion, stimulus, from reading good books, without studying them minutely and exhaustively. But as long as human intelligence remains what it is, scientific curiosity is likely to be irrepressible; and scientific curiosity will always prompt men to study literature minutely and exhaustively. And, while they do this, assuredly they will be studying Style, for Style is the

essential part of literature. Subtract style, and only what is ancillary to literature remains: literature itself is gone.

We put the same truth in other words if we say that the criticism of Style is the essential part of literary criticism. For the minute and exhaustive study of literature which is practised by the scientific student is just what is meant by literary criticism in its ideal and proper form. Criticism has been thought and spoken of as vaguely as Style itself; sometimes the word has stood for what is dignified, fruitful, and praiseworthy; quite as often for what is petty, barren, and destructive. But, if we put aside preconceptions, and ignore the popular associations of words, if we consider what have been the methods and the results of the critical study of literature from the dawn of criticism until now, we shall not easily conclude either that the study is unimportant or that it is not the handmaid of a knowledge which is power. We shall feel that only to know minutely and exhaustively, only to know critically, is to know worthily; and that the true critic's reward, which he wins at the end of his labour, is nothing less than the fellowship of the greatest minds which have found their expression in words. If to such fellowship, with its glories and its possibilities, the study of Style be the pathway, surely no excuse is needed for entering on it.

In the following chapters an attempt will be made to lay the elements of Style before the reader. We shall deal first with the most obvious, and, also, in many respects, the most important, difference which the subject includes, the difference between expression in poetry and expression in prose. We shall briefly consider translations; *i.e.* attempts to reproduce compositions in languages other than those in which they were first written. There will then

present itself the great and difficult question of fitness : the proper relations and correspondences which exist between expression and what is expressed. Those matters are general and fundamental. We shall then deal with the elements which make up extended literary compositions, with words, phrases, sentences, and divisions larger than sentences, such as paragraphs, chapters, parts, or what not. Then will come unity, which is a matter, as we shall see, of greater moment than appears at first sight. And finally we shall have to take account of the influence on expression of fashion and individuality, forces which many people believe to be the only ones concerned in the production of Style.

CHAPTER II

POETRY AND PROSE

THE first matter which we have to consider is the difference between expression in prose and expression in poetry. A moment's thought will convince us that this difference is both preliminary and fundamental.¹

It is preliminary, because it is the most obvious and striking feature, at first sight, in literary compositions. The first thing which a child would notice in reading or hearing words or sentences, would be whether they made verse or not; and we cannot begin to study any subject better than by explaining that in it which first catches the notice of a child.

It is also fundamental. We soon find, when we go into the depths of the matter, that some of the most vital problems connected with Style take their rise in the region where poetry parts company with prose. Here we must be content to speak dogmatically; it will be the object of this chapter to show the truth of what has been said.

In what respects does poetry essentially differ from prose? That is the hardest question; and we had better begin by putting it. Perhaps the best first step towards finding the

¹ In a perfectly complete analysis of Style we should have to note that the most elementary form of expression is gesture, which may or may not be rhythmical. Under such elementary conditions, it is emotion, rather than thought that is expressed. But in this book, we do not attempt an analysis so complete, and begin our study of Style with words.

answer will be to consider whether the most obvious difference is essential. The most obvious characteristic of poetry is *verse* or *metre*, which may or may not be accompanied by rhyme.

Under these words "verse or metre" must be included not only the metres of developed Western poetry, but such quasi-metres as the parallelisms which are the formal *differentia* of Hebrew poetry; wherever, in fact, there is expected recurrence of some collocation of words, or some sequence of stresses.

Is the presence or absence of metre the essential difference between poetry and prose?

We must not be too ready to answer that it is not. We are, perhaps, tempted to do so without thought, because it seems childish to make the difference turn on metre.

Childish it may be in the sense of attracting the notice of a child; and yet it may be of fundamental importance. We cannot think clearly about this matter without recognising that the presence or absence of the formal element of metre determines whether a composition is poetry or prose. There are, it is true, pieces of prose (*i.e.* compositions without metre or rhyme), such as De Quincey's *Dream Fugue* (forming section 3 of his *English Mail Coach*) or Charles Lamb's *Dream Children*, which are often called "prose poems" because they seem to have every characteristic of poetry except verse. On the other hand, there are poems, such as Dryden's *Religio Laici*, which, though in verse, seem to have every characteristic of prose. Most of the work of the American Walt Whitman looks and sounds quite like prose and is yet (not without reason) regarded as poetry. Yet, if we are to make a satisfactory antithesis between poetry and prose, *Religio Laici* is definitely

poetry and the *Dream Fugue* definitely prose: they look at each other across a strait. Walt Whitman seems to make himself at home on both sides or on a bridge between them. He often writes mere prose; often there are in his work expected recurrences and other rhythmical devices which make it quasi-metrical; rarely there is true metrical regularity.

When, however, we have decided that, by virtue of metre, *Religio Laici* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are brothers in a family from which the *Dream Fugue* is shut out, we have leisure to realise that the differences between poetry and prose other than the formal difference are many. Occasionally they seem closely approximate; more often they seem to diverge infinitely. What, let us now ask, are some of the chief distinguishing tendencies and fitnesses of poetry, always formally antithetic to prose as we have found it to be? Before answering it, we must return for a moment to the question of form.

In a great deal of prose there is something which is called *rhythm*; and an increasing number of critics hold that it is not only of great importance, but also more or less susceptible of analysis and schematic exposition. Now such rhythm cannot be very different from the quasi-metre spoken of above as entering into what has been asserted as the differentia of poetry. If we may and must say that *Job* and *Lamentations* are poetry, must we not say the same of many parts of De Quincey, Ruskin, and even Burke? And are we not driven to the conclusion that there is no true formal distinction between poetry and prose at all?

I think that if what I may call the new believers in prose prosody are right, we cannot escape that conclusion. And

as that conclusion seems to me absurd, I am disposed to doubt whether the recurrences and regularities which constitute prose rhythm in any modern western literature are really so susceptible of schematic exposition as to be homogeneous with the recurrences and regulations of *e.g.* Hebrew poetry. There will probably always be difference of opinion on this matter. We may content ourselves provisionally with the reflection that if the formal barriers between prose and verse should ultimately break down, boundless divergence of tendency and fitness will remain.

(1) One distinguishing characteristic of poetry is that it favours intellectual creation. There is, in many men and in all artists, a strong impulse to create or produce something which has not been created or produced before, and in which they may hope to live immortally. It may be a cathedral or a statue or a picture or a symphony; from our point of view here it will be a "book."

Now, a monumental work of this kind may, of course, be produced in prose; one has only to think of such books as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, or of some great novel such as *Don Quixote* or *Tom Jones*, to feel that it is so. But (at all events hitherto) literary artists have as a rule embodied their creations in verse. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*; *The Ring and the Book*; *The Idylls of the King* (to name a few at random), all aim at creation in a sense different from that characteristically aimed at in prose.

The reason seems clear. Creation is the giving form to mere matter; the reduction of what is chaotic to correct order. The more manifest the order, the truer the creation, the more fully the creator realises and satisfies

himself. Of all outward signs of order in literature metre is the most evident. If, therefore, a writer desires to produce or create a work both original and immortal, he will (having chosen his theme) naturally design a poem, whose metrical restraints and conventions will facilitate his giving an artistic form and order to the flow of thought and feeling in which his theme presents itself to him. Only exceptionally does prose give anything like the same facilities.

(2) Another great difference between poetry and prose is that the former favours *literary egoism*, while the latter favours *literary utilitarianism*. It is necessary to explain this carefully, and show its importance.

One may have many objects in writing, whether in verse or prose; but, on the whole, there is a great twofold division among such objects: men write (*a*) for the sake of expressing themselves or (*b*) for the sake of doing some service. The former class of objects or motives we call egoistic; the latter utilitarian. The two kinds of objects may, of course, be combined; one may wish both to express oneself, and also, by expressing oneself, to do some service to others, *e.g.* to give information, to spread opinions, to improve literary taste, help public morals, or what not. But the two classes remain distinct; and the difference between them is the most fundamental in literature.

The egoistic writer contemplates some aspect or part of the universe; it may be the Deity or the starry heavens; it may be some great event or personage in history; it may be convulsions in the depths, or ripples on the surface, of society; it may be a beautiful woman or a child. As he does so, emotions and thoughts arise within him and seek for expression, not—primarily at least—for any object whatever beyond his own emotional and intellectual relief.

The utilitarian writer may or may not experience the same or similar emotions and thoughts; but at any rate when he takes up his pen he has presented to himself some altruistic end or object; he will argue; he will explain; he will amuse; in any case, he will minister somehow to the taste or benefit of readers. Whether, in so doing, he feels the relief of self-expression or no, is a secondary question.

Now we find that for the literary egoist poetry rather than prose is the natural and satisfactory medium. It may at first sight seem strange that this should be so; that for mere emotional and intellectual relief one should naturally use a mode of expression so dependent on art, so hedged about with rules and limits, as poetry. But we must remember, in the first place, that many kinds of poetry are simple, and that their art is easily learned in elementary education. English verse in especial, though it abounds in complex and difficult forms, depends almost wholly upon accent or stress; and stress is an elementary and easily understood quality of all human utterances whether in verse or prose. But there are deeper reasons than this for the fitness of poetry to be the appropriate means of self-expression. If we consider the matter carefully we shall see that though prose seems an easier, and, as we say, more "natural" instrument than poetry, it is in reality a more difficult, a more restraining, and less natural one.¹ In spite of the metrical rules which poetry has to

¹ Perhaps, in this connection, it would be well to avoid the use of the vague and ambiguous word *natural* altogether. The word has given a great deal of trouble in the course of intellectual history, because it has been freely used to mean two dissimilar and indeed opposite things; that which would be done by a savage or an untrained child, and that which it is the aim of education and civilisation to produce and perfect; or, to put it otherwise, it is made to stand for both what is most undeveloped and what is most developed.

obey it is freedom itself compared to prose. For prose has two characteristics, two ideals, which are not (or, at least, not in the same sense) the ideals of poetry, and which have a restraining effect on the writer; the ideals of a *perfect logic* and a *perfect clearness*. Whatever the best prose may want, it ought to show a faultless sequence of thought, a faultless lucidity of language. It is otherwise with poetry. Poetry, of course, cannot, any more than prose, defy the laws of logic, which are the laws of thought. But poetry can to a very large extent dispense with that sequence of thoughts, that interdependence of thought on thought, with which logic is concerned. Logic is concerned with discourse; and poetry has but little to do with discourse. The best poetry is often abrupt, exclamatory, rhapsodical, paradoxical, extravagant; it depends on intuition; it gives no reasons. Again, poetry cannot, any more than prose, defy intelligibility; good poetry must be neither jingle nor gibberish, nor the language of mental confusion. But (as we shall presently see more particularly) it is often impossible for poetry at its best to produce the effect which we indicate by the metaphorical words "clearness" and "lucidity"; constantly at its best it makes no attempt to produce it.

Thus we can understand how it is that poetry, being largely independent both of logic and clearness, lends itself to the needs of egoistic literature, of literature whose primary motive is the relief, by self-expression, of the writer. Discursive prose, aiming, as it always must aim, at perfect logic and perfect lucidity, is a difficult and hampering instrument for the literary egoist to use. Stirred by thought and emotion which he is forced to utter whether there are ears to hear or no, he uses a mode of expression which is

akin to the arbitrary and discontinuous operations of his mind, the abrupt and suggestive character of his message. On the other hand, the literary utilitarian, whose writing is conditioned by the needs or tastes of others, finds his appropriate instrument in prose, whose essential ideals of logic and lucidity are the essential qualities which secure the efficiency at which he aims.

But, while it is certainly true that poetry and prose have these respective fitnesses, it ought never to be forgotten that there exist on the borderland between the two both prose-poetry and prosaic poetry; and that both have honourable places in literature. In trying to understand what those places are, we shall be much helped by our distinction between what is egoistic and what is utilitarian. Prose-poetry like *Dream Children* and prosaic poetry like *Religio Laici* arise, we cannot but feel, when the prose writer is soliloquising for his own relief and the poet is submitting an argument to the intelligence of his readers. The absence of verse in the one and its presence in the other are little more than accidents, which may or may not hamper the full attainment of the writer's ends. It may seem that dramatic poetry, which is primarily designed for an audience, and is essentially social in the character of its themes, can hardly have the egoistic origin which is claimed for poetry in general. But the normal drama is a very complex product; it includes in many cases a large proportion of sheer prose; and, when it consists of verse only, there is no reason why the verse, though put into the mouths of others, should not be primarily the means of the poet's self-relief, and so claim that essential motive of all poetry.

(3) Another important difference between poetry and

prose is that the former favours the *suggestive*, and the latter the *explicit*, in literary expression. This difference, as we have already hinted, arises out of the preceding one. The writer of verse, mainly bent on the expression of his thoughts and emotions, may legitimately be content with merely suggesting them; the writer of prose, mainly bent on doing some service to his readers, must make of the explicit his ideal, and this however abstruse may be his theme. So far as the prose writer is concerned this is evident, and little needs to be said about it. The prose writer as such succeeds only when he knows just what he means to say and says it in perfectly intelligible language, language which is neither deficient nor redundant. The case of the poet requires more consideration.

What is it to be suggestive in expression? It is to express oneself under two conditions, one of which is always present, while the other may or may not be present. The condition which is always present is that the words give the writer's meaning incompletely; the condition which may or may not be present is that the writer's meaning is not fully realised by himself.

The poet, being a writer whose chief aim is to find relief by the expression of his thoughts and emotions, need not feel bound to express his meaning completely. To make himself intelligible to others must be for him an entirely secondary aim; if he attains self-relief he has already hit his mark, and his ideal obligation is discharged. But how about his readers?—for, after all, whatever the poet may be ideally, he can hardly be said to succeed practically unless his utterance commends itself to other intelligences; he is not a mere voice crying in the wilderness. If we consider carefully, we shall find that the poet's

chief prerogative is to satisfy others with the incomplete expression which is enough for himself. The poet's success with his readers is identical in kind with his success in giving himself intellectual and emotional relief. He succeeds with his readers only when he utters thoughts and emotions which they can recognise as theirs; when he reveals them to themselves. The poet and his readers deal, we may say, in a common stock; and their operations on it are of the same nature. A meaning, however incompletely expressed, may, therefore, do for the reader of poetry what it has already done for the poet; it may open the prison-house of his mind and heart.

If we said no more than this, it might seem as if suggestive expression, though sufficient for a purpose, were in itself of lower rank than explicit expression, with the consequence (which is evidently absurd) that the poet is inferior to the writer of prose. And we may seem to be still nearer this absurdity when we consider the second condition under which the suggestive writer expresses himself;—that his meaning need not be fully realised by himself. It may seem as if, by admitting this condition, we held that the poet's utterance might fall below what we may call the average human level; as if it might approximate to the utterance of the insane or the inarticulate.

Such inferences would be quite mistaken, and imply a misconception of the functions of expression. The power of words to suggest is as important and, to say the least, as dignified as their power to make explicit. The meaning which transcends explicit, exhaustive expression, often does so by reason of its own greatness, not by reason of any failure on the part of him who tries to express it; and often, when words fail to do more than suggest, it may be faintly

and vaguely, they are fulfilling the highest function of which expression is capable. Thought is infinite and language is definite; and the definite can never make explicit the infinite. Yet the infinite may be suggested; and it is the suggestion of the infinite which the poet, like the musician and the artist, essays. He essays other things, of course; nay he, like the prose writer, often tries to be as explicit as he can, and gives poetic satisfaction without the slightest shortcoming of the ideals of intellectual satisfaction, namely logic and lucidity. But to these ideals he is in nowise bound: his essential and characteristic theme is the universal, the all-embracing, the omnipotent; and such a theme can be treated (in poetry, at least) only by suggestion.

It is one of the obvious characteristics of suggestive, as distinguished from explicit, statement, that its meaning, being infinite, is susceptible of an infinite development. It need not, therefore, surprise us that a poet's meaning in its fulness should often be hidden from him. His genius is that of the discoverer; his powerful vision descries a new land; his divination points to a buried treasure; but it may be for others, ages after he is gone, to possess the riches. When, for example, a poet writes:

“Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves,”¹

he writes what, considered as an explicit statement, might fairly be called a truism, and only says in other words: “It was not the Divine purpose that men should be wholly selfish.” But the words are not to be taken as an explicit statement; they are poetry, and their power lies in their boundless suggestiveness, the suggestion of the infinite

¹ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act I. Sc. 1.

altruistic import for good or evil of human lives and deeds. And that import, and, with it, the meaning of the words which suggest it, is progressively realised as the evolution of society goes on, to an extent immeasurably beyond the utmost insight of the poet.

To say that one of the highest and most characteristic functions of poetry is its power of suggestion, is much the same thing as to say that the highest and most characteristic gift of the poet is *imagination*. We speak much about imagination; but no word, perhaps, is harder to define. There is no need to try to define it here; but it may be said that, however we define it, and however many things we mean by it, it must always involve the idea of suggestion; suggestion of the concept by the perception; of the thing signified by the sign; of the whole by the part; of the past or the future by the present.

One word more may be said under this head, though it is not much more than the repetition of what has been said already. We have said that poetry of the highest class often aims at the explicit; and we may now add that some poets (*e.g.*, Tennyson and Matthew Arnold) habitually aim at it, while other poets (*e.g.*, Keats and Walt Whitman) habitually have no such aim. The aims, and the habitual character of the aims, make the great difference between two classes of poets.

(4) Poetry, in a greater degree than prose, lends itself to the exhibition of *power* in literary expression. Power is one of the most important and comprehensive qualities of literature; and it is, of course, a quality of prose as well as of poetry. But what do we chiefly and essentially mean by power in literature? Or—to put the question in another way—what is the highest kind of power possessed and

claimed by literature? The answer surely is: the power to move the whole nature, intellectual and emotional, of the reader or listener; such a rendering of the theme as makes it a living and astonishing and transforming force. Power, so conceived, is, of course, a very variable thing, with partial as well as overwhelming manifestations; but there seems to be implied by the word always the idea of a stirring of the emotions as well as a satisfaction of the intelligence; the awakening of wonder or awe, as well as the winning of assent. Now, it is quite evident that this result may be produced by prose as well as by poetry. Prose fiction, for example, which, though in English a comparatively youthful, is also a very vigorous and important, branch of prose literature, wins some of its undoubted triumphs by that strong appeal to thought and feeling together which we understand by power. And what is true of prose fiction is equally true of that rarer and more dubious literary species, prose poetry.

But, in spite of what prose can do in this regard, we cannot but feel that the chief agent of literary power is poetry. The reasons are not difficult to find. The essential thing in literary power is the stirring of the emotions; and to stir the emotions is the primary object and main prerogative of metrical utterance. The greatest masterpieces of the greatest poets, as well as the body of popular, national, and traditional poetry, spring from feeling (*i.e.* thought suffused with emotion), and to feeling they make their appeal. Poetry, let us repeat, does not primarily aim at the satisfaction of the pure intelligence; it often dispenses with the perfect logic and lucidity by which that satisfaction is brought about; it is content with suggesting what it can never hope to make explicit; it is often abrupt,

enigmatic, rhapsodical, paradoxical. With such prerogatives and characteristics, it is the most fitting instrument for moving the whole nature of its hearers and readers, in other words, for exhibiting power.

Matthew Arnold, writing of Wordsworth, says: "Nature often seems to take the pen from his hand and write for him with her bare, sheer, penetrating power."¹ That is hardly a figurative or extravagant way of expressing what constantly happens in great poetry, and what can hardly happen otherwise except in what are called "the fine arts" and in music. With the fine arts and music, poetry shares, as prose can never do, the privilege of revealing to mankind, not the cleverness, ingenuity, or talent of an individual writer but some of the inner meaning of the whole of things. And that inner meaning, of which the poet or artist is but the medium, is what Arnold calls power.

(5) It is but to take one step onward to say that poetry, in a greater degree than prose, lends itself to the representation of the *beautiful*. Poetry which stops short with mere power, fails, we feel at once, to realise its ideal. Its readers ought not only to be stirred and shaken by the aspects of things which it reveals, they ought also to be æsthetically satisfied, to experience a feeling akin to, but different from, and nobler than, pleasure or delight. This sense of æsthetic satisfaction is that sense of the beautiful which poetry, like the fine arts and music, is so well able to give. It is very different from the intellectual satisfaction which it is the characteristic triumph of prose to produce; the satisfaction produced by successful exposition, by faultless logic and faultless lucidity. It is æsthetic satisfaction; the sense often nobler than mere pleasure, often keener than

¹ Introduction to *Selections from Wordsworth*.

mere delight, that responds to certain aspects, certain presentments of things. What those aspects, those presentments are, is another question, a question which has perplexed philosophers, and which may be evaded here. We may be content here with a popular and superficial notion of what constitutes the beautiful; we need be precise and fundamental only about that feeling in us which responds to what we call the beautiful, and careful not to confound it, on the one hand, with that feeling which responds to what is merely true, or, on the other, with that kind of pleasure which is caused by the gratification of our bodily senses.

Poetry shares the prerogative of art to convey the beautiful; and its metrical structure is both the symbol of this prerogative and the means of its exercise. The use of "measured language" in itself suggests the beautiful, and assumes its existence and attractiveness. In metrically ordered sounds there is a sensuous pleasure for the ear which is a legitimate element, though not the most important element, of æsthetic satisfaction. Poetry, also, inasmuch as its instrument is language, is able to do what neither music, painting, nor sculpture can do. Its range of themes being unlimited, and its medium being words in their ordinary sense, ruled by the grammar, syntax, and logic common to all human discourse, poetry can take heed of the beauty of the world, the beauty of men and things, can separate it, so to speak, and show it up to men in what is substantially their every-day language. For the appreciation of music and the fine arts there are needed special sensibilities of ear or eye which are often deficient or imperfect in otherwise normally constituted persons; and thus to many the language of music

and the fine arts is unintelligible.¹ And even to those who are what is called musical or artistic, the arts which make no use of words necessarily reveal the beautiful in a more abstract way than poetry, the greater number of whose themes are persons, events, places, feelings, known to all men, and whose treatment is by means of words which the dictionary defines. Poetry casts (if we may help ourselves by a figure) a kind of illumination of its own, akin to, yet utterly different from, the light given by prose, on men and things, and shows them, not as intelligible but as beautiful. The poet's field is as wide as the universe; he may treat "of old unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago"; of pregnant historical events; of epoch-making personages; of theological facts or dreams; of the face of distant lands; of birds and flowers; of the joys, the pains, and the vagaries of love. He may be autobiographical or self-forgetting; he may, with Browning, regard little as worth study but the development of the soul, or he may seem to move about in an extra-human world, lovely because unvexed by "what man has made of man." The writer of prose may do the same; and must do it with the same stock of words. And the prose writer may exceptionally so treat of things, so borrow the poet's light, as to show their beauty and give æsthetic satisfaction; the prose-poet may do it; the philosopher and historian may do it; above all perhaps, the novelist may do it. But they do it under a great and constant risk, the risk of being called to account in the interest of the intelligible, the logical, the "natural," the veracious. The prose writer's constant obligation and

¹ The reader will not suppose that I am asserting that in any one place or at any one epoch reading poetry is more congenial to the average man, woman, or child than hearing or performing music or looking at pictures or statues.

characteristic endeavour is to minister, not to the sense of beauty, but to the sense of truth; and beauty and truth, though they may be one in their ultimate nature, are different as we understand and deal with them. But the poet can never be too much pre-occupied with beauty. He may shine, legitimately and always, with his own light: that it is a glamour and hides deformities can be no discredit to him. His chief mission is to be the prophet of the beautiful.

It is thus evident that expression in poetry is a much more complex matter than expression in prose; and that the study of poetic style is more difficult, and (at least from the point of view of knowledge) more important than the study of prose style. The chief objects of prose (let us never forget it) are to be true to fact, perfectly logical, perfectly lucid, complete, intelligible, convincing, and interesting. It is indeed not easy for a writer to attain all these objects; and whatever we can find out as to how they are attained cannot fail to be important. But the poet's aims, as we have seen, are different, and some of them, at least, are harder. He has to make egoism, the expression of his own subjective self, not only endurable but wonderful and delightful. He has to make the vaguely suggestive more illuminating and helpful than the most fully explicit. He has to make human nature quiver under the strength of his operation. Above all, he has to make bare, without failing or flagging, the beauty of a world where there is so much to hide and injure the beautiful, in the essential beauty of which so few people are able to believe.

CHAPTER III

TRANSLATIONS

IN a place by itself, involving both poetry and prose, stands the literature of translations. If it were not a fact that many translations are literary masterpieces, there would be little to say about the art of translation in this book. But there exists in the literature of Great Britain one work which by itself proves translations to be not only literary, but high in the foremost rank of literature. That work (I need hardly say) is the Authorised Version of the Bible.

The Bible is of special importance to the student of Style for three reasons. In the first place, it is a piece of great English prose which is yet only a translation from other and very different tongues. Secondly, its idiom represents an evolution: though published in 1611, the English Bible was not made then by a translator or group of translators, but only completed as an embodiment and adaptation of versions which began to be made nearly a century (or even more) earlier. It is thus a monument of pre-Elizabethan, quite as much as, or more than, of Elizabethan prose. Lastly, it has had, partly for literary and partly for religious reasons, very great influence on the diction of subsequent English literature.

With this great example in mind (and we shall soon be able to add others), let us consider wherein the essential stylistic problem of translations consists.

It consists, apparently, in the possibility of multiple or multilingual expression of meaning. We ask: Can the same meaning really receive first-rate literary expression in more languages than one?

Two considerations make a negative answer plausible. One is popular; the other philosophical.

The popular consideration is often alleged. It is constantly said that translation (in any full and real sense of the word) is impossible, because style is native and original, and the most expert translator must fail to reproduce it in any other language. At best he can only do one of two things: (1) give a bald version of substantial meaning (as is done in students' "cribs"); or (2) make versions which are mere paraphrases, of which the characteristic merits, however great, are necessarily different from those of the originals. To this it may be answered at once that while much of it may be true, it does not negative the possibility of multiple linguistic expression. For, *ex hypothesi*, not only may "substantial meaning" be expressed in translation, but it is obvious that paraphrases may suggest the original so closely that the differences between them and the originals are to all intents and purposes transcended and overcome.

The popular consideration derives what strength it has from the underlying philosophical one. As we have seen, the relation between meaning and expression, substance and style, is very close—so close that to some thinkers they seem inseparable. "The meaning is in the style," say these thinkers, "and when one seems to be seeing or hearing style, it is really meaning that one sees or hears." If this be strictly true, it seems evident that multiple expression of the same meaning must be indeed impossible,

and that no translation can get nearer the original than a kind of paraphrastic imitation or suggestion.

This objection seems to rest on the conception of style as a much less complex and divisible thing than in this book we conceive it to be. It seems to imply that meaning must be either expressed or missed *in toto*.

In this book, we waive consideration of the ultimate problem of thought and expression, and assume (what is at all events practically certain) that a great deal of expression is optional and therefore separable from meaning. That being so, there seems no reason why meaning should not be expressed in more languages than one. We may, if we will, concede to our philosophical critics that it cannot be expressed as fully and well in another language than the original; we may admit that, at most and best, translations are paraphrases rather than *replicas*. But our critics must make two concessions to us in return. With the English Bible before them, they must admit that a very large part (at least) of essential meaning can be expressed and expressed truly, beautifully, and grandly, in translation; and with such works as Pope's Homer, Dryden's Vergil, and Professor Gilbert Murray's versions of Euripides before them, they must admit that paraphrases (so to call these) may be great companion works to the originals. And we need ask for no more.

We must conclude, then, that matter and manner, thought and language, meaning and expression, are (at all events practically and partially) separable; and that multiple expression of the same meaning is possible. But there remains something still to be said.

Translations (*i.e.*, translations of first-rate literary rank) differ greatly in respect of closeness to the original.

Generally speaking, it may be said that translations of prose (*e.g.*, Cotton's Montaigne) are more homogeneous with the originals than verse translations of poetry. The reason seems evident. Prose sentences are to a large extent homogeneous in all languages. But it is otherwise with verse, which is complicated by prosody. Each language has its appropriate prosody; and hardly any languages have prosody in common. The best translations in verse have been those in which the translator, making no attempt to reproduce the prosody of the original, has used metres congenial to himself or to the age in which he lives. No two metres could be further apart than the hexameters of Homer and Vergil on the one hand, and the rhymed heroics of Pope and Dryden on the other. Yet, from a literary point of view, Pope's Homer and Dryden's Vergil are much better work than any attempts to translate Homeric and Vergilian hexameters into English hexameters. How are we to explain this fact?

We shall not explain it successfully by magnifying the difference between the originals and the translations—by saying, *e.g.*, that Homer is a great product of Heroic Greece, and Pope's Homer an admirable product of England in the reign of Queen Anne, and that it is not much more than an accident that they treat of the same characters and events. If that explanation will pass in the case of Homer and Pope, it will not avail in other cases of the same kind. How are we to explain the undoubted excellence of many prose translations of poetry, *e.g.*, Messrs. Butcher and Lang's version of the *Odyssey*? That, we may justly feel, is nearer the original than many translations in verse, in spite of the great differences between verse and prose; and it is because of its greater

nearness that we chiefly value it. Yet we cannot say that the nearness is attained by the reproduction of meaning at the expense of style, as in a "crib." On the contrary, the nearness is to be felt as a nearness in style almost as much as in meaning. And the approximation is made in an idiom which is as much the author's, as much that of an accomplished prose writer of the nineteenth century, as the idiom of Pope is that of the poetry of England's Augustan age, or Homer's the idiom of Heroic Greece.¹

We can only, it seems, explain these things, we can only learn the secrets of translation, by realising more fully, and re-affirming with stronger conviction, the separability of meaning and expression, and the possibility of the expression of the same meaning in more languages than one. We cannot escape the conclusion that there is, after all, a great difference between paraphrase and translation, and that the difference is, essentially, that between mere similarity, and substantial identity, of meaning. If we choose to call Pope's Homer a mere Queen Anne paraphrase, or Messrs. Butcher and Lang's version a mere nineteenth-century dilettante's paraphrase, of the original Greek, we are immediately rebuked by the certain fact, that neither Pope nor Messrs. Butcher and Lang meant to paraphrase, or regarded themselves as paraphrasing. The translators in question meant to reproduce Homer, not to work independently on his lines; and, each according to his lights and taste, they conscientiously strove to reproduce him in equivalent terms, sentence by sentence, phrase by

¹ This in spite of the fact that the diction is deliberately archaic, as Messrs. Butcher and Lang in their preface tell us that it is. For it is no paradox to say that archaism of this kind, archaism such as that practised by William Morris or Mr. Maurice Hewlett, is as much a phase of an accomplished contemporary writer's idiom as a less self-conscious and more colloquial diction.

phrase, word by word. That the result was, in the one case, a poem in rhymed heroics, in the other, a piece of delicate nineteenth-century prose, is evidence of perfect (and we may add self-effacing) sincerity. Pope, we may be sure, had no doubt that Homer's meaning was something apart from his language, and that it would go, *mutatis mutandis* unaltered, into the translator's congenial (or natural) verse-idiom. What Messrs. Butcher and Lang felt and aimed at, they have told us in the preface to their version of the *Odyssey*, and that preface the student of this subject could not do better than read. It is enough to say here that while they modestly disclaim any attempt to reproduce what they call "half the charm" of Homer, his "music," his "movement," and his "fire," they do claim to have tried to reproduce "half his truth,"¹ a half which they call "historical." Here we must feel that modesty has led them to misrepresent themselves. Such a distinction between history and poetry, between fact and charm, is too popular for the purposes of the careful student of Style; nor is truth really divisible. There is much more than parts of Homer in this version; nay, it is very questionable metaphor to speak of "parts" in this connection at all, and still more, to speak, as the translators do, of crumbs from a richer table. The original is Greek verse and this is English prose; whoever, therefore, wants Greek verse will not find it here. But he will find something very different from mere "history" or archæology; he will find *Homer*, Homer with the inevitable and great differences, Homer read with English nine-

¹ Or rather, as they oddly put it, *to tell half a truth about Homer*. Here, surely, their modesty has led them astray. Whatever their version is, it is certainly not an essay or commentary on Homer.

teenth-century eyes, but still Homer. It will be evident to him that the conscientiousness which the translators claim to have spent on part of Homer has really been spent on the whole; that here is Homeric "poetry," Homeric colouring, Homeric tone; here are Homer's thoughts, phrases, words.

The case of the English Bible is still more convincing. The English Bible has a twofold significance, and has achieved a twofold success. It is a translation of a great literature, but it was not made on that account. It was made because the translators believed its books to be the documents of a supernatural revelation, necessary for the salvation of the human race. The primary object of the translation, therefore, was to reproduce meaning; it was the meaning, and nothing else, that was vital. As a reproduction of meaning, in spite of the heterogeneity of language, it is, of course (with whatever drawbacks and imperfections), a great success. But it is an equally great, perhaps a greater, success as a piece of English prose. From the translators' point of view such success may be fairly called accidental, almost involuntary: they laboured for religion's sake, and their lucky star, the felicities of English prose in their days, made the result of their labour a great literary masterpiece. Such supreme double success can be explained only on the assumption that what is, practically and essentially, the same meaning may be expressed, and expressed with first-rate literary merit, in the idioms of more languages than one, and in idioms, alike in language and in time, widely different.

Such being the theory, is it possible, let us ask, to arrive at any practical rules for translation? Two general and comprehensive rules seem to suggest themselves at once.

1. The translator, whether in verse or prose, ought to make a faithful reproduction of meaning his primary object. He ought to adopt the ideal expressed by Browning as to his version of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, and "be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language." He is bound to do this; for his primary aim is, not to make a paraphrase suggested by the original, but to reproduce the original, for the original's sake only. With the example of the English Bible in his view, he may do it with confidence, and without fear that literality and first-rate literary quality are incompatible.

2. He must not stop short with the literal reproduction of meaning. Browning's ideal, cited above, is a quite inadequate one; and we may say that, because Browning was content with it, his *Agamemnon* is in a rank far below, *e.g.*, Coleridge's version of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, or Professor Murray's versions of Euripides. Here, again, we must think of the Bible, and remind ourselves that, without treachery to meaning, translations may attain the highest literary rank. We must remember, not only that meaning may be faithfully (though, perhaps, not fully) reproduced in more languages than one, but also that it may be so reproduced with the noblest and most unfettered exercise of the idiom of the language of translation. This is, perhaps in some respects, the greatest miracle of expression; but it is a well-attested one, and without faith in it some of the most signal literary triumphs cannot be won. Want of faith in the miracle—the feeling that the translator must work with an idiom in fetters—explains such poetry as this:—

" And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,

Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place;
 Who did not,—tardy—caught, no wits about him,
 By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.”¹

It is Browning's idiom, of course; but it moves in chains. Contrast with it this:—

“ Right swift Orestes took
 The Dorian blade, back from his shoulders shook
 His broochèd mantle, called on Pylades
 To aid him, and waved back the thralls. With ease
 Heelwise he held the bull, and with one glide
 Bared the white limb; then stripped the mighty hide
 From off him, swifter than a runner runs
 His furlongs, and laid clean the flank.”²

This is the idiom of first-rate English narrative verse, and it moves with as perfect ease as if it were its own original. Its author has gone beyond Browning's inadequate ideal, and has done his work in the full assurance of faith. And every translator may feel, and ought to feel, that for such assurance there is ample warrant.

¹ Browning's "Agamemnon" of Æschylus. *Works* (1897), vol. ii. p. 517.

² "Electra" of Euripides, translated by Prof. G. Murray (1908), p. 54.

CHAPTER IV

FITNESS IN POETRY

THE last general matter which falls to be considered, before we go on to the particular analysis of expression, is fitness. Can we discover, either in the nature of things or in the practice of great writers, or in both, general principles regulating the relation of thought to expression, matter to manner, substance to form?

This is a very important question, and also a very difficult one. It is very important because, from the want of clear notions about fitness in style, readers and critics often make serious mistakes. For example, a writer is often regarded as a master of style in general, although his style is fitted only to certain themes; and thus writers who treat equally well of different and perhaps nobler themes, may lack due appreciation. Such a writer as Swift or Goldsmith, whose style may be of the highest excellence for the purposes of the pamphleteer, the satirist, and the essayist, or as the vehicle of scorn and humour, may be unduly praised in comparison with, *e.g.*, Jeremy Taylor and Ruskin, whose styles are of the highest excellence for the different purposes of the expounder of religion, the prose-poet of æsthetics and ethics, the revealer of natural beauty.

But the question of fitness is as difficult as it is important. When we go below the surface we find serious problems.

Can we think without language? Is expression coincident with, or posterior to, thought? Is there any real and perceptible moment, however infinitesimal in its length, in which a speaker or writer pauses between a thought or feeling in the past or present, and the word or words to express it in the future? Are the popular distinctions between the matter and the manner, the substance and the form, of literary compositions, real distinctions? All these problems are difficult; the solutions of them are doubtful. In a book of this kind they must be evaded; and we must be content to start from popular notions, and refrain from probing some of them.

Our starting-point must be the definition on p. 2, where expression is called *the translation of thought into language*. The word translation stands equally for a process and a product. Its use evades the ultimate logical problem of the relation of thought and language; if it should turn out impossible to think without language, there is nothing in the word translation which implies that one may so think; the translation may be part of the thinking. At all events, it is quite certain that the complete translation of thought into oratorical or literary style is a gradual thing, a thing of stages; and our interest in it as students arises at a stage where the speaker or writer has both opportunity and necessity for volition and choice. In particular instances, indeed, much of this choice may be so instinctive and rapid that the writer is unconscious of acts of volition; on the other hand, it may be the result of prolonged and painful labour. But the student notes that in all cases choice, and what may be called literary masonry and architecture, have place and determine the result; and so he feels the propriety and urgency of a search for general

principles by which such construction and achievement are wrought out.

In what shape may we expect to find such principles? We can only hope to answer fully when we have come to the end of this book; for the object of the book is to consider in detail this question of fitness. In this and the following chapters we approach the details of our investigation by some general consideration of the appropriateness of styles to the chief kinds of literary composition. In this chapter we confine ourselves to poetry, and consider what styles are appropriate to (1) the epic or narrative poet; (2) the dramatic poet; (3) the lyrical poet; (4) the poet of disquisition and argument; (5) the poet of nature; (6) the poet of humanity.

1. *Epic or narrative poetry*.—Narrative poetry may be regarded as a larger class or genus, of which epic poetry is a smaller class or species. Every poem which tells a story ostensibly for the sake of the story is narrative poetry, whether it is a ballad like *Sir Patrick Spens*, a tale in verse like *Marmion* or *Aurora Leigh*, or a record of stupendous events, real or imaginary, such as *Paradise Lost* or Homer's *Iliad*. It is best to keep the word epic for those narrative poems (sometimes called heroic) which deal with famous men and such deeds as are remembered in history, or with the deeds and persons of demi-gods or gods. With such a use of the word, *Paradise Lost* and Homer's *Iliad* would be epic, while *Aurora Leigh* would not; and *Marmion*, dealing with historic events as a background to the display of events and characters not historic, would be on the borderline.

The first essential of narrative poetry, whether deserving the name epic or falling short of it, is that it should, as

was said above, tell a story ostensibly for the story's sake. It is therefore *prima facie* objective poetry. We found that one of the most important characteristics of poetry in general was that it favoured literary egoism, and was, therefore, *prima facie* subjective literature. Is narrative poetry, being objective, an inferior kind of poetry? If not, how does it combine objectivity with the characteristic egoism of the truest poetry?

In encountering these questions we must remember, in the first place, that the egoism to which poetry lends itself is in no way inconsistent with objective themes, *i.e.*, with personages and events interesting for their own sakes. The poet can find self-expression and self-relief otherwise than by the mere utterance of his own emotions. The narrative or epic poet may be purely objective in the sense that he may never utter a directly personal emotion at all; and yet he may at every stage relieve and reveal himself in the act of telling his story, of turning fact into poetry. It must be noticed, secondly, that narrative poetry does undoubtedly lie near the confines of prose; and that it is perhaps harder for the narrative or epic poet to be truly a poet than, *e.g.*, the dramatic or lyric poet. The harder the task, the greater the triumph when it is well done. The task of the narrative poet is to choose such a theme as may interest by its mere evolution; and so to treat it as to make its evolution poetic. This he can do in the best way only by putting himself into, or finding himself in, the theme of his choice. What style, what methods of expression, are appropriate to him?

All that can be said about them at this early stage of our inquiry is derived from consideration of the combined objectivity and subjectivity of the narrative poet's aim. That

combination we may expand a little in terms of the characteristics of poetry in general distinguished in Chapter II. The artistic duty of the narrative poet, then, is to tell a story, interesting in itself, in such a way that it shall (1) express his real self, his deepest artistic predilection and conviction, to the extent, perhaps, of seeming the result of a kind of creative effort; (2) to tell it without that devotion to the explicit and veracious which is the duty of the narrator in prose, but rather with a reliance on such an apparatus of imaginative suggestion as may raise the whole work to the poetic level and keep it there. He not only may, but must, idealise the events and characters he describes; and that obligation enables him to throw over his work a glamour, derived from his own preferences among things and his own versions of things, such as secures for the most objective themes the subjectivity which characterises true poetry. (3) He must exhibit his theme as having an intrinsic life and power in detachment from himself. (4) He must tell his story so as to convey a sense of beauty, to produce in the hearer or reader an æsthetic satisfaction or delight which is often, though inadequately, called pleasure.

On this last matter of beauty in narrative poetry we ought to pause for a moment. It is not at all difficult for any reader to realise the kind of satisfaction and delight which he gets from beautiful poetry. When he thinks of many narrative poems, he is very likely to feel that beauty, as distinguished from interest and power, often occurs but occasionally and episodically in such poems. Long descriptions, he will say, of sieges or of battles; the windings and unwindings of a complicated plot; dialogues in verse—all these may, by an ingenious poet, be made acutely

interesting; none of them, in such hands, need be unpoetic; but can they always, or often, be made beautiful?

We must answer that, at all events in narrative poems of great length, they cannot. Historically, the European epic is derived from the poems of Homer; and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were originally recited or sung by wandering minstrels. The motives of the recitations were patriotic as well as artistic; and many parts of the poems, *e.g.*, lists of names, repetitions of narrative, or descriptive *formulae*, were not intended or expected to impress the hearers as beautiful poetry. Inequality of poetic value and intermittence of the beautiful came to be regarded as inevitable in long narratives, even when they were composed under modern conditions. When a narrative poet fails to attain to the distinctively beautiful in every part of his poem, we may be not dissatisfied if he frequently or even occasionally does so; if he makes it plain to us throughout that he has a strong sense of the beautiful, and is ever aspiring towards it. We must also remember the need of a very wide and comprehensive definition of beauty; a definition which will not separate it too absolutely from, *e.g.*, power or imagination, and will bring into it as many qualities as possible which produce satisfaction or delight in the reader.

Two things may be said in this chapter about the styles appropriate to narrative poetry.

(1) In the typical narrative poem the author is the narrator, who expounds, with or without comment, the events and personages to the reader, and follows, for his benefit, the evolution of the story or plot. For such a method the obviously appropriate style is a strongly marked and continuous metrical system; it may be the hexameters of the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*; the blank verse of *Paradise*

Lost; or some such rhyming scheme as that of *Marmion*. Though there are exceptions to the rule, it is undoubtedly true that he who tells a story, whether in prose or verse, is disposed to tell it, on the whole, smoothly and continuously, and with what may be called a stately march. There is, *i.e.* there ought to be, an ideal of dignity, of sustained elevation, in the mind of the narrative poet, even though his theme may not be of epic rank.

(2) But, secondly, the exceptions to this rule must be recognised. Narrative poetry is many-sided and complex. Many narrative poems are also lyrical and, it may be, dramatic. The power and beauty of many ballads, with their lyrical versification and narrative interest, show us at once how well a story may be told lyrically. When we think how much every story has to do with characters, real or imaginary, human or quasi-human, with their behaviour and their interplay, we realise how often narrative poetry may be dramatic as well. The stylistic tendency of these disturbing (or complementary) elements in narrative poetry is to break up metrical continuity, it may be by the introduction of stanzas, it may be by variation of metres, it may be by the broken verses of dialogue. In all cases, and whether he is writing what we may, for the moment, call pure or mixed narrative, the poet is guided by his double subjective-objective obligation—to show his inner self, and to tell an interesting story.

2. *Dramatic Poetry*.—Coming to dramatic poetry, we find one difficulty on the threshold. It lies in the fact that in most plays prose and verse combine to produce the total effect. In comedy the difficulty may not be great: the metrical and non-metrical utterance may co-exist, as poetry and prose, without any attempt at intimacy of

combination, as joint-contribution to a humorous or graceful result. But in the so-called "poetic" comedy, and, much more, in the "history" or in tragedy, the critical difficulty may be real. Take, for example, *Othello* and *King Lear*, perhaps Shakespeare's greatest efforts, certainly the most tragic (so to call them) of his tragedies. The total effect of these is undeniably that of poetry; and yet in both there is some prose. What part (if any) does the prose play in the production of the total effect?

Careful study makes it clear that the effect of the prose and verse (even where, as in the utterances of the Fool in *Lear*, there is an element of comic humour) is entirely homogeneous. And the homogeneity seems to be attained in both plays, and in high tragedy generally, by the infusion of the prose with poetic qualities, *e.g.* passion or pathos, which fully compensate for the absence of metre, the formal differentia of poetry.

(a)

"Filial ingratitude!

Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to 't? " ¹

(b) "Then let them anatomise Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts? " ²

No one could feel any heterogeneity in these utterances, though the first has metre, and the second has not.

In poetic comedy (*e.g.* *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*) the dominant motive is what we may call *beautiful humour*: and, in the hands of a great master, beautiful humour, like overpowering evil in tragedy, may render prose and verse perfectly homogeneous.

In speaking of dramatic poetry, then, we mean primarily

¹ *King Lear*, Act III. Sc. 4.

² *Ib.*, Act III. Sc. 6.

verse, though we can hardly exclude prose so poetic as to be (except as to metre) homogeneous with verse.

One or two principles as to fitness suggest themselves.

(1) As to the use of prose and verse in poetic drama. The ultimate guide would here seem to be the tact of a master of both prose and verse. But some rules, subordinate to this supreme and indefinable authority, may be referred to. Thus, the action of the play may prescribe the distribution of prose and verse. When, *e.g.*, the action is very rapid, it may be too rapid for verse. Metrical utterance presupposes some leisure, some deliberation; and situations frequently occur when leisure and deliberation are impossible. To present these situations in metrical dialogue might be to retard and artificialise them. Again, some explanation is needed in every play. The spectator has to be told who is who and what is what; and it may be more in harmony with poetic effect to give such explanation in the best prose than in what it may be difficult to make better than inferior verse. Realism has paramount claims in the most idealistic drama; and, again and again, realism may prescribe prose. In every case, however, if the poetry of the whole is to be saved, the prose must be the prose of a poet.

(2) The expression in dramatic poetry is necessarily divided between dialogue and soliloquy. The chief stylistic difficulties, however, arise in what we may call the borderland between them; in speeches which are made in dialogue, *i.e.* are listened and replied to by an interlocutor, but which are long enough to have much of the effect of soliloquy. Here the poet has to meet the subjective-objective obligation which presses on the narrative poet. In one direction he is driven by the impulse to express his egoism, to find

beautiful metrical utterance for thought or feeling which, being his own, he attributes to characters of his creation; hence a predominance of long speeches, in solitude or company. In the other he is drawn by the ideal of drama as social; and by the fact that all speech which gives self-expression to the dramatist rather than elucidates the action of his characters is apt to be undramatic. How is he to steer?

Only, it would seem, by keeping the double obligation constantly before him, and by restraining the excesses of his temperament. His speeches must not be dragglingly long; therefore he must restrain his egoism. His action must be poetic action—action worthy of exposition in the best poetry; therefore the utterance which expounds it, even when it is in prose, must be poetic; and poetry always savours of egoism as in this book we understand it, *i.e.* it expresses the innermost individuality of the poet. Ideally, dramatic poetry is neither narrative, descriptive, nor lyrical; yet every great play (*e.g.* of Shakespeare) has to its advantage elements describable as such; and all such elements require rather long speeches. The difficulty of steering is great; but the dramatist has stars to guide him. He has, *e.g.*, the requirements of characterisation. All plays require character-drawing; some require a great deal. Where a complex character has to be expounded, long speeches—it may be of autobiographic narrative, it may be of psychological analysis, it may be of ethical argument—need not, if balanced by adequate action, be undramatic. Again, he has the dramatic value of *atmosphere*, of scenery, weather, costume, locality, linguistic or racial peculiarity. All these things may be exhibited in the style of dramatic poetry, as well as, and better than, by elaboration of scenic

effect or artfulness of elocution; and one of the best ways of exhibiting them is by making the characters talk about them at opportune times and within fitting limits; the opportuneness and the limits being determined by the necessities of the action.

(3) In general terms we may say that the style of dramatic poetry needs, before all things, undulation and variation. It must be capable of rising and falling according to mood and theme and character; it must be made to fit the grave and the gay, the good and the bad, as these qualities are expounded by and to be inferred from the words of self-consistent characters. The dramatic poet must idealise his characters, else his work will not be poetry; he must make them speak with verisimilitude, else his work will not be drama, which undertakes to represent life, and does not consist of sayings about life.

3. *Lyrical Poetry*.—It is useless to examine lyrical poetry in any aspect without attempting in some way to define it; and its definition is very difficult.

The original meaning of lyrical obviously is that which may be “sung to” (as the phrase goes), or accompanied by, the lyre; and, in its original application to poetry, the word stood for such poetry only as might be an actual counterpart of actual music. But, as poetry and music developed and diverged, the properly musical signification of lyrical passed away from some uses of the word, and it came to be applied to poetry not necessarily meant to be accompanied by music. In course of time, and in process of development, it almost seemed as if the word became a residual word; as if it were loosely applied to all such poetry as could not be called either narrative or dramatic. Few literary epithets have had so startling a

progress from the narrowly definite to the indefinitely wide.

In trying to differentiate lyrical poetry, therefore, we must start from this end of the development, with such a multiform—and, in a sense, heterogeneous—collection of poems in mind as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. When we do so we realise, to begin with, that what we may call *songfulness*, i.e. a mysterious affinity with, or potentiality of, music, remains a primary essential of lyrical poetry. Lyric is that kind of poetry which most readily lends itself to musical accompaniment or illustration, or to a singing recitation. We also realise other differential qualities which may be briefly indicated.

(1) Lyrical poems have *completeness in brevity*. Even the long odes which Palgrave includes among lyrics, even descriptive poems of such leisurely pace as *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, or homely narratives like Wordsworth's *Ruth*, are short, are soon over; and many of the contents of the *Golden Treasury* are mere scraps, mere breathings, of verse. Yet brevity never is a drawback; it is length, we feel, which has to justify itself. And this because the lyrical poem has an unrivalled power of attaining completeness and finish without length or bulk.

(2) Lyrical poems have *metrical charm*. Charm here means something different from power. It would be absurd to say that metre, the formal differentia of poetry, has more power, is more efficient, in lyrical than in narrative or dramatic poetry. But the part played by metre in a great epic or a great drama seems more implicit and inseparable than the part played by it in a lyric, where the poet comes before us *as a metrist*, causing metrical surprise, and giving metrical delight, as he goes along. It is this special,

separable ingenuity and delight which we distinguish as charm.

(3) Lyrical poetry is specially characterised by *subjectivity*. Here we reach the heart of the matter. In narrative, and still more in dramatic, poetry, the freedom and fulness of the poet's self-expression are, or may be, checked by the necessary objectivity of his themes, of the tale-telling or character-drawing which he must execute. If we examine the whole body of lyrical poetry accessible to us, we shall find that a very large part of it is frankly egoistic, the expression of the poet's moods, feelings, hopes, desires, aspirations; his love, his hate, his despair. And even when this is not the case, when the poetry takes the form of narrative or of elaborate odes on impersonal themes, still, with its metrical variety and its comparative freedom from tradition and convention, it lends itself to the expressional idiosyncrasy and so to the self-relief of the poet.

(4) Lyrical poetry is especially characterised by *suggestiveness*. This quality, like subjectivity, belongs to the essence of poetry in general; but it belongs to lyric *par excellence*. This happens partly through the songfulness of lyrical poetry; partly through its individualism. Music is the most suggestive of all modes of expression; even the greater definiteness which is given to it by the aid of words can never make it really explicit. Lyrical poetry in its fullest development keeps the birth-marks of its musical origin. With other musical or quasi-musical qualities, it has kept that power of fulfilling itself by mere indication, adumbration, and suggestion which music has pre-eminently, and which tends to diminish with the introduction of words, and to give way to the different power, pre-eminently characteristic of prose, of satisfying by explicit and

exhaustive statement. Again, it is made suggestive by its individualism; by the metrical variety, the tolerance of eccentricity, the general expressional suppleness which fit it for the utterance of idiosyncrasy. Between suggestiveness and the expression of individualism or idiosyncrasy there is a natural affinity. An artist, who is claiming the world's interest in his emotional peculiarities, will naturally do so with as much subtlety and delicacy as possible; neither he nor his readers could bear the immodesty of a complete display. In "unlocking his heart," therefore, the lyrical poet, if he be indeed a poet, will open the door very cautiously, and tempt his reader by glimpses of the good things within.

If the foregoing are the main differential and defining qualities of lyrical poetry, it would seem that it may be regarded as typical and quintessential poetry. The chief characteristics of poetry, as distinguished from prose, are to be found, no doubt, in all great or good poems; but they are often hidden and may be missed or ignored. In lyric they are undeniable and unmistakable; their operation is certain and immediate.

Lyrical poetry, then, being what it is, what can we say at this preliminary stage as to the style or styles appropriate to it?

The most striking features of lyric being its indestructible connexion with music on the one hand, and, on the other, its variety and complexity—the number of intellectual and emotional states which it expresses and reproduces in others—the range of lyrical style will evidently be determined by those features. Lyrical style must, in the first place, be songful; and, secondly, have flexibility and variety. Whatever metrical forms prosody may prescribe

or allow, the result must be what is popularly called "musical": the poetry, though it may not require the help of music proper, must, as "song," be radically distinguished from prose, as speech. Again, the extent and variety of what is essayed by lyrical poetry, secure for it great licence of expression. The licence of expression of the narrative or dramatic poet, great as it is, has great limitations; much of his diction is necessarily closely akin to the diction of prose. For the lyric poet such bounds and kinship hardly exist. In one sense his medium is the medium of prose; but it is his prerogative to express in the vocabulary and the syntax of ordinary speech thoughts and feelings which, it may be, wholly transcend it; to reveal, in the language of "common life," beauty of which common life knows nothing; to convince the world of paradoxes, such as the novelty that lurks in routine, or the breathless and deathless interest which belongs to some personal experience as old as the world. So great, indeed, is the licence of lyric that every great lyric poet in a sense must find his own style. But he must use his liberty under certain restrictions. *E.g.* he must learn to distinguish individuality from eccentricity. He must avoid a wantonly outlandish or pedantic diction; puzzling and inharmonious metres; a perplexing and vexatious obscurity. He must not sacrifice meaning to sound. A poet's words may master him; and, when this happens, it is not well. Abandonment to emotion and inevitableness of expression are, no doubt, leading features of lyric; but the emotion must not fritter itself in words; and the feeling of the inevitable must be given, not by the copiousness and fluency of the diction, but by its naturalness, *i.e.* its perfect and apparently unstudied proportion to the emotion. Finally, he must be an artist

without being *artificial*, *i.e.* without suffering matter to be prescribed by form. As artificiality of manner arises in society when one's gestures and words are not, either by instinct or education, the spontaneous expression of one's thought and feeling, so it arises in literature when the writer convinces us that the art of his expression is his primary care and is not imposed or prescribed by that which is expressed.

4. *Poetry of Disquisition and Argument.*—Into this class I bring poems often called “didactic.” That word is, I think, as much as possible to be avoided in connexion with poetry; because, though many poets of the first rank have undoubtedly intended to teach by their poems, and though poetry may teach as effectively as any schoolmaster, ideally the poet is not, as such, a teacher. Even disquisitory and argumentative poetry must stand or fall with its power of giving æsthetic satisfaction or “pleasure.”

Whatever we call it, this kind of poetry presents difficulties. When we think of some great poem, with its powers of revelation, of mystical or wayward suggestion; above all, of its unreserved dedication to the beautiful, “how,” we cannot help asking, “can that be poetry which seems to have none of these powers, whose ideals, in fact, the ideals of logic, lucidity, and explicitness, seem indistinguishable from those of prose? Is not the only sign of poetry which such work possesses the attribute of verse, a mere conventional artificiality which confers none of the reality of that which it pretends?”

The last question we meet by reminding ourselves that between prose and poetry there is no absolute difference at all, except that made by the presence or absence of metre. Technically, wherever there is metre there is poetry; and

therefore it may always be reckoned a waste of energy to discuss whether disquisitory or argumentative verse is or is not poetry.

The essence of the remaining difficulty is as to the relation of such poetry to the beautiful. We must deal with it much as we dealt with the similar difficulty in connexion with narrative poetry, where we argued that power and beauty pass into one another by imperceptible gradations, and that where power and imagination are present, it may be unreasonable to complain of the absence of beauty. In "didactic" as in narrative poetry, we must construe the notion of the beautiful liberally and widely; we must realise its affinities with the notion of power; we must not distinguish pedantically between the intellectual satisfaction which is the success of prose, and the æsthetic satisfaction which is the success of poetry. We must remember Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Browning's *La Saisiaz* (poems to a large extent, at least, argumentative, if not didactic) as well as such poems as Young's *Night Thoughts* or Pope's *Essay on Man*. There can, surely, be no doubt that, in the hands of an artist, the use of metre may give to disquisition and argument a radiancy and lightness, a swiftness of movement, an audacity of power, a directness of appeal, which may produce that pleasure or delight which has always been regarded as the correlative of beauty in poetry. While it is true that much disquisition and argument have been made to seem all the duller and more repulsive by their artificial association with the lilt of verse, it is also true that there are, even in the unpromising regions of logic and controversy, possibilities of enthusiasm, even of ecstasy and passion, scope for play of the imagination and affinities with the lyrical and

dramatic, which may, by a perfectly natural process, carry expression beyond prose into poetry.

For the kind of poetry we are considering the range of expressional fitness is very wide. In the first place, didactic poetry has so many of the characteristics of prose that it makes many of its expressional demands. The supreme ideals of prose are logic and lucidity; and such also are the primary ideals of disquisitory and argumentative poetry. Whatever qualities and devices of expression secure the logical clearness of prose—simplicity and directness, correct grammar, quickly intelligible syntax, will help to build up the excellence of didactic poetry.

Again, such poetry, being poetry, will make requirements secondary in, if relevant to, prose. It will insist on obedience to all lyrical or dramatic calls which may be heard on any side. It may tolerate rhetoric as, in disquisition or argument, prose could not tolerate it. Suggestiveness is more appropriate to argumentative poetry than to argumentative prose; and whatever suits suggestive writing, the abrupt hint, the delicate innuendo, the meaning showing under its transparent veil of metaphor, will suit this kind of poetry. Finally, such poetry is the very home of *wit*, and of all that wit can accomplish.

Hitherto we have been considering different kinds of poetry mainly as they are determined by form. We now consider two which are determined by theme or subject-matter.

5. *Poetry of Nature*.—By poetry of nature I mean poetry of which the theme is the natural world apart from man; apart *i.e.* in the sense of not being nearer than background or surroundings. It does not regard man as an ingredient of nature; though it may recognise his presence in it.

Nothing in literary history is more interesting than the different views held by poets as to the suitability of nature to poetic treatment. Many poets, *e.g.* Pope, seem to have regarded it, not indeed as wholly unsuitable, but as much less suitable than themes of human interest. Others, *e.g.* Thomson, Pope's younger contemporary, have built their reputation on the poetic treatment of nature. Among those poets who treat much of nature there are great differences as to method of treatment. Nature may, *e.g.*, be treated (1) *realistically*; its phenomena may be registered and described with more or less evident enthusiasm and love. It may be treated (2) *idealistically*; its phenomena may be altered from what they are as so-called "matter-of-fact" by the intelligence and imagination of the poet. It may be treated (3) *philosophically*, as those do who deal with nature in order to reflect on it; to show its inner significance, to exhibit it as an expression of mind or soul, a phenomenal veil through which unseen realities are partially revealed. It may be treated (4) *pastorally*, as those do who deal with it, not directly, but through certain traditional conventions.

In his treatment of nature, the poet is evidently not restricted to any one poetic form. He may treat of it in narrative or drama without the slightest incongruity; though it is perhaps to lyric that it lends itself most essentially. When nature appeals to a poet at all, she calls out in him an appreciation which tends towards devotion, and so to find expression lyrically, as devotion naturally does. The lyrical poet is *par excellence* the poet of suggestion; and the poet of nature—the poetic interpreter of nature, as he has been called—lives in a world of suggestion. Nature is for ever revealing herself to him by

suggestion; she speaks to him a language of analogies, types, symbols; and what he learns and knows of her he passes on to others in the same kind of language, a language which makes no attempt either at exhaustiveness or scientific accuracy.

Nature-poetry, I have said, may disregard man, or may, while true to its name, treat nature as background or surroundings of human affairs. In the former case, we may call the treatment *pure*; in the latter, *mixed*.

What general rules of expression, positive or negative, can be asserted or surmised for the poet of nature?

The poet of pure nature will treat it either objectively or subjectively. If the former, his problem is much like that of the narrative poet: to show the phenomena with the utmost power and beauty at his command. Consistently with the lucidity and continuity which description primarily requires, he must be as objective and self-effacing as the poet ever dares to be; he must let nature speak for herself, only taking care that she speaks as she does to the poet. His style, therefore, ought to show balance; to be held on the one side by the needs of truthful representation, and, on the other, by the needs of beauty and power.

If the poet treats nature subjectively, his style will be influenced otherwise. As he looks at nature, and represents her in his verse, he may think of her scenery, animate and inanimate, her rocks and clouds, her flowers, her beasts and birds, as if they made up a world on specially intimate terms with himself. He will make no attempt at self-effacement in their presence; on the other hand, they must follow his moods, suffer his passions, sing for his joy, echo his despair. Or, as an idealist, he may exhibit them in a light and atmosphere not strictly their own, a light and

atmosphere of subjectivity and invention rather than of objectivity and "reality." Yet again, as a philosopher, he may care for them as essentially symbolic, the language of a voice behind them, of a Deity within and beyond them. Whatever he may bring to or find in nature, the poet of pure nature who is not a mere describer is under few of the rules which bind the descriptive poet. Alike for the egoistic, the idealistic, and the philosophic poet, it is nature universally, or, at least, in very large aspects, that is the real theme. For all, therefore, obligations of precise accuracy or photographic fidelity hardly exist. It is the same with the duty of expressional restraint which lies on the describer. The subjective poet of nature may show abandonment, originality, idiosyncrasy of style, with fuller licence than the poet whose aim is to represent definite phenomena in fitting words. He may, in fact, much more fearlessly than the descriptive poet, yield himself to the characteristic tendencies of poetry, which carry it away from the central ideals of prose.

Poetry which regards nature subjectively easily passes into poetry which uses it as a background or environment of humanity. In this mixed poetry, nature is subordinate and ancillary to man, and serves as a source of illustration, comparison and contrast. Its expressional range, therefore, *as* nature-poetry, will be narrower than that of the poetry of pure nature. If we examine the chief specimens of it in our national literature, we shall find that it consists mainly of similes on the one hand and of moralising descriptions on the other. A simile proper is an illustration; and a simile from natural phenomena, professing to throw light on human phenomena, will fail of its effect if it is not realistic, if the hearer or reader cannot quickly feel its

relevancy. Poetry which draws human morals from landscapes or animal life is under the expressional obligations which bind descriptive poetry in general.

A word ought to be said about the treatment of animal life by the poet. Generally, it may be said that poetry of animals ought to be allusive and brief, whether they interest the poet for their own sake, or for the sake of their supposed bearing on human life. If prolonged descriptions of animal life are allowable at all in the best poetry, they ought to be only of animals remarkable for their beauty or rarity, and even then they must be restrained by the poet's tact, not abandoned to the naturalist's predilection. But the poet's special opportunity with animals is *humorous* treatment. Humorous poetry which is not meant merely to tickle by its absurdity or to dazzle by its wit, has its chief source in intelligent sympathy, sympathy with the humbler aspects of life, with the very young, for instance, the neglected, or (which is our present concern) with many aspects of animals. The poet of nature who wishes to include animals in the scenery of his verse and who is not concerned to describe the dignity of great beauty or rarity, ought to be inspired by the humour which springs from sympathetic insight into the ways of those which are familiar.

Pastoral poetry is peculiar, and calls for careful consideration by the student of style. Historically, it was originated by Greek poets, Theocritus, Bion and Moschus; imitated and adapted by Vergil in his *Bucolics*; and introduced into modern literature at the Renaissance (*e.g.* conspicuously into English literature in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*). In the Greek originals it was to some extent a direct version of open-air phenomena including both scenery and human affairs (in Theocritus Sicilian landscape, with shepherds,

fishermen, and others), but was already conventional and artificial. In the derived pastoral poetry of Vergil, and, still more, in that of English poets (Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, Milton's *Lycidas*), the treatment of nature, and of the invented human figures to which it was a background, was thoroughly conventional, and often consisted of little more than the fiction that the characters were shepherds and shepherdesses, with unreal names, speaking and acting in rural surroundings. The human interest (which in typical pastoral was predominant) would make it fitting to class it as poetry of humanity rather than of nature, were it not that the shepherd-and-shepherdess convention became almost at once so highly artificial as to make the characters and interest quasi-human rather than human in any deep sense. The human interest of pastoral poetry was either idealistic, elegiac, allegorical, satirical, didactic or humorous; and it might have been supplied almost as well by puppets or birds and beasts as by human beings. But, in spite of its artificiality which made it essentially rhetorical, pastoral poetry was, in its best specimens, a poetry of nature by virtue of its original birth in genuine Sicilian air, and by virtue also of its underlying presupposition of the poetic value of beautiful scenery, innocent animals, and open-air life. It was easy for it at any moment to drop the artifice, and to become a poetry of nature, pure or mixed, without any conventional alloy. And that transformation—so far as British literature is concerned—may be said to have actually happened in the eighteenth century. With exceptions to be noticed presently, it is true to say that Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* was the last pastoral of or near the traditional type in British poetry. It is a striking

coincidence that the date of the *Gentle Shepherd* is 1725, and that of *Winter*, the first of Thomson's *Seasons* to see the light, is 1726. As a poet of nature, Thomson was a solitary forerunner; Ramsay was fixed in the past. Pastoral poetry became a monument; but the love of nature and simple folk which had moved its founders was born again in the great poets of the Romantic Revival, and in the prose of many a novelist, and its end is not yet.

The pastoral convention finds perhaps its best justification in its fitness for elegiac poetry. Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis* is as much alive, and as truly a poem of the first class, as *Lycidas*; and the method and atmosphere of both are pastoral.¹ Here we have one of the paradoxes of style. No one would attribute want of genuineness to Milton's feeling for Edward King or Arnold's for Arthur Clough. Why, then, did they express their affection and regret through so artificial and frigid a medium?

We surely cannot doubt that the pastoral element was introduced into these great elegies as a check on expression which might else have been too individual and unrestrained for art. Sorrow has or ought to have its reserves, especially sorrow intended for publication; and poets so skilled in the use of pastoral imagery as Milton and Arnold may well have felt that its forms made a costume in which feeling might decently present itself.²

¹ The pastoralism (in the conventional sense) of *Thyrsis* is, of course, much slighter (quantitatively, it is a mere matter of one or two phrases and allusions) than that of *Lycidas*; and the charm of the poem is in its treatment of real landscape and actual places under their own names. But (such is the poet's skill), the pastoral phrases are, like some well-chosen and potent spice, strong enough to flavour without spoiling the whole poem, and make it pastoral throughout.

² The mythology of Shelley's *Adonais* seems in somewhat different case, though its justification is not very different. *Adonais* is much

6. *Poetry of Humanity*.—Some things have been said on this class of poetry earlier in the chapter. Human interest is so boundless in extent and varied in aspect, that, in the last resort, it would seem that all poetry except poetry of pure nature—even most poetry of the preternatural—is poetry of humanity. Here we try to answer this question only: What styles are appropriate to poetry dealing directly with man, individually or in society?

(1) Such poetry may be *expository* or *satirical*. *I.e.* it may, on the one hand, treat human affairs on the assumption of their dignity, and consequent fitness for poetry; or it may deal with them on the opposite assumption of their unworthiness, and the poetic value and interest of their exposure and castigation. The one kind of poetry is prompted by reverence for humanity as it is, the other by disapprobation or contempt. Each has its fitness of style.

Expository poetry of human affairs, being based on faith in the high significance of humanity, ought to have a style expressive of reverence. It is not a poetry of despair, apology or illusion; it sets forth the truth or beauty of what readers already believe to be true or beautiful. The style ought to have the plainness and directness, the modesty and restraint, which the truest reverence prescribes. The maker of such poetry will abstain from rhetoric, excess of ornament, wanton ingenuity or obscurity. He will be specially conscious of the obligation of truth, whether of portraiture or imaginative insight.

The satiric poet's outlook and method are very different. We are obliged to admit that from one of the chief charms more a literary tribute than a personal lament like *Lycidas* or *Thyrsis*; and one accepts the mythology as the most beautiful and costly wreath which the brother poet could devise and bring to the bier.

acteristics of poetry, the pursuit and expression of the beautiful, satire is, by the nature of the case, almost wholly debarred. Two eminently poetic qualities, however—passion and invention—may be characteristic of satiric poetry. We expect the satirist in verse to show emotional preference among the aspects of character and behaviour, and to do so in ingenious and unexpected ways.

Satiric passion may be *indignation*, *scorn*, or *hatred*. Satire which is moved by indignation reaches a high poetic level with difficulty. It is difficult to mix indignation pure enough to inspire poetry with contempt enough to turn it into satire; and to provide indignation strong enough or emotional enough to be distinguished from mere disapproval. A great deal of interesting English poetry, by Johnson, Cowper, and others, consists of moralising about evil inspired by disapproval; but it is hardly poetry of the first class.

Contempt leads to scorn, which is the chief emotional source of satire. Wherever there is self-conscious superiority there will be scorn; and, in literature, where there is scorn, there will probably be satire. The mood of satire has various aspects which affect literature differently, and which are determined partly by the presence or absence of good nature in the scorn; partly by the degree of the satirist's superiority. He may be genial enough to feel some sympathy with or compassion for people whom yet he must despise. Such feeling will naturally produce *humorous* satire, with the expressional characteristics of humour. If sympathy is almost or altogether absent, and if the superiority of the poet to what he satirises is not very great, his scorn will be the more intense, and will find its appropriate expression in *wit*, and the various resources of style

which wit employs — epigram, damaging comparison, allegorical innuendo, rhetorical exaggeration, and the like.

The satiric poetry inspired by hatred is that kind which arises from antipathy to individuals. It partakes in some measure of the qualities of the other two kinds. The individuals fitted for treatment in literary satire can hardly be other than prominent persons, either in the world's estimation, or, at least, in that of the poet's contemporaries; and the hatred which he feels for them may be the hatred of moral indignation or the hatred of scorn. As such, it has command of many expressional resources, especially those of rhetoric and wit.

We cannot deal with the question of the appropriateness to satiric poetry of particular forms. One thing only need be noticed here: the peculiar fitness of allegory to satire. The allegorist has two strings to his bow, an apparent version and an occult version. Each may attract separately; while the relations between the two versions, the suggestions and surprises involved in them, are a source of imaginative interest. Such an appeal to the imagination is a powerful aid to the poetic treatment of vice or folly.

(2) Again, human affairs may be treated in poetry with *realism* or *idealism*. By realism is meant the effort to represent the characters and actions of men and women exactly as they are, without any modification or alteration by the poet; by idealism, the effort, or the irresistible tendency to represent them as so altered or modified.

The effort of the realist can be only partly successful. He can never rid himself of the æsthetic bias by which phenomena are re-arranged into a work of art, nor of the moral bias by which a moral being must show

moral preference among human phenomena. Yet he may be partly successful. He may give an almost photographic impression of his men and women. Realistic poetry assumes that human nature as it is is interesting enough for poetry. Interest is not necessarily the source of what we ordinarily mean by pleasure; by a realistic poet human nature may be shown as unpleasing, harsh, and ugly. On his style there will lie the obligation of sobriety and undulation: his style must not preoccupy him, must not prescribe to him; it must rise and fall, must go hither or thither according to the movements and aspects of the theme. The poet's expressional attitude must be one of perfect sincerity; and he must practise a self-repression which may make it a hard task for him to show that egoism and devotion to the beautiful which we have found that poetry characteristically requires.

The idealist treats humanity, as given in ordinary experience, as so much raw material to be worked up; the men, women, and children of what is called actual life are hardly interesting enough (he feels) for poetry; they must be modified, changed, transfigured. There are various methods of transfiguration, which we may class as *exaggerative*, *alterative*, and *suffusive*. The idealistic poet may think himself justified in making bad people worse, good people better, beautiful people more beautiful than they really are; he may exaggerate their difficulties or the virtues by which their difficulties are overcome. Secondly, he may, more or less consciously, change the models from which he works until they suit better his preconceived idea of what they ought to be. Or, lastly (and this is the finest and subtlest method of idealism), he may, while seeming to refrain from exaggeration or alteration, suffuse the persons with whom

he deals with what the reader feels to be a glow or glamour imparted by himself, and not actually in the objects.

The expressional range of the idealistic poet of humanity is much larger than that of the realist. He is the wielder of a lordship; he is even (as he is so often called) in a sense a *creator*; he creates characters, creates situations. His style is therefore under no obligation to undulate with the ups and downs of the actual. It may include rhetoric; it may be ornate; it may abound in figures of speech; it may be terse or copious; it may be daringly and boundlessly suggestive; it lends itself to metrical variety and surprise; above all, it is the idealist rather than the realist who is self-dedicated to the beautiful.

(3) Lastly, poetry of humanity may be *selective* or *universal*. The poet may, on the one hand, assume that certain classes of men and deeds only are worthy of poetic treatment. In the history of poetry, this selective theory has unquestionably been in the ascendant. The opposed universal theory, the theory that human nature always and everywhere has dignity enough for poetry, has generally been the principle of revolutionary minorities. The preponderance of the selection is disguised by the width of the range of choice.

The number of "select" themes for poetry is so very large that we may fail to realise, in taking stock of literature, that the majority of poets have rejected, or have never dreamed of the idea of what has been called a "poetry of common life." The epic and dramatic ideals (and not less the rhetorical and artificial ones to which poetry has ever been ready to stoop) have necessitated an aristocratic order in the world of themes. And therefore those who declare for the masses against the classes, the Wordsworths

and the Walt Whitmans, are few in number, and are apt to seem either tiresome faddists or barely respectable libertines.

The mention of Wordsworth and Whitman brings up the chief expressional problem connected with the difference between the selective and the universal treatment of humanity. Selection shows no special problem, but rather all the problems that wait on the poetry of humanity as such. But on the small body of courageous universalists there waits always the puzzle about "poetic diction." Does the assumed value for poetry of all men and all human phenomena imply the poetic value of the ordinary speech of men, as of the bare enumeration of things so often given us by Walt Whitman? Or are there not rather on the poet at all times obligations of idealism and imagination which may possibly not restrict his choice of themes, but which can justify his choice of those which are "common" only by his use of a style (among other things a diction) which is not ordinary? The problem can only be stated now.

CHAPTER V

FITNESS IN PROSE

FROM styles appropriate to poetry we pass to those appropriate to prose.

Difficult as is the classification of poetry, it is easier to classify poetry than prose. We have seen how different kinds of poetry overlap and interlace; and how, in trying to make classification complete, we have had to use two principles of division. But for our help we have always had the time-honoured classification of the Greeks made immortal by Aristotle, the triple group of the epic, the dramatic, and the lyric; and we have been able to adopt and adapt this with comparative success.

In prose we have no such monumental division. In spite of the great histories and scientific treatises produced by the Greeks in their best days, in spite of the philosophical dialogues of Plato, Greek written prose had not for critics enough interest and dignity and variety to lead them to analyse it as they analysed poetry. I have said *written* prose; because oratory did interest them, and prompted them to construct their science of rhetoric.¹ The pre-

¹ It is significant that the great writer on Style, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who wrote c. 20 B.C., makes Demosthenes his chief exemplar of prose, as Homer of poetry; and that he praises the style of Demosthenes for its *poetic* character. See D. of H., ed. Rhys Roberts, cc. 25-26, and Introduction.

dominant utilitarian motive of prose, its ostensible aim at benefiting or informing, kept it for a relatively long time outside the regions of recognised art and scientific criticism. Without much classical guidance, we have, therefore, to classify prose as best we can, remembering its predominantly utilitarian object.

We consider, then, what styles are appropriate to (1) the oration; (2) the treatise; (3) the history and biography; (4) the essay; (5) the prose drama and dialogue; (6) the novel; (7) journalism.

1. *The Oration*.—The oration, *i.e.* the spoken, as distinguished from the written, discourse, is the elementary form of prose. In so far as it consists of mere conversational speech, it is too elementary, and too imperfectly reported even when spoken by such talkers as Johnson, Coleridge, or Carlyle, to come within the scope of this book.¹

The chief literary forms of the oration are the “speech”—political, forensic, or what not—and the sermon. Before considering these, however briefly, we must say a few words about *rhetoric*, in the principal current sense of that word.

In this sense, rhetoric stands for the sum of those qualities of expression by which meaning is specially pressed on, or recommended to, the hearer or readers, and the temptation to it besets both poetry and prose. Like many other qualities it enters expression insidiously, and may be difficult of detection in its elementary stages. Its motives may be various and of different moral value. The speaker or writer may wish to promote some great or necessary action; he may wish to do justice to a noble

¹ Similarly there is hardly anything to be said about the style of letters. We require them, but only for decency's sake, to be grammatical; and that is nearly all. The incalculable personality of the writer must do the rest.

theme; he may wish merely to show off his own skill or sell his work. But, whatever his motive, the rhetorician's underlying assumption is the same; his meaning must be made impressive, made attractive, emphasised, driven home.

Rhetoric, I have said, besets all forms of literature; but—as is, indeed, obvious—it specially besets the oration, the speech, or sermon. For every speech or sermon, it appears, must necessarily recommend its theme; probably, in modern times, it would not be made unless there were need for such special recommendations. In spoken speech there is much besides verbal expression; there are gestures, tones, tricks, all of which have expressional value. The rhetorical qualities of any given spoken speech may lie, to a great extent at least, in these adjuncts; and the speech reduced to mere written words may be—at least comparatively—unrhetorical. We ought, therefore, in the criticism of all written oratory, to dismiss from our mind any thoughts of the physical sounds and movements by which its original effect may have been enhanced.

Great secular orations are rare in English literature; and most of them are broadly referable to two classes: some (1) abound in evident rhetoric; others (2) seem comparatively non-rhetorical, and give an impression of persuading by the objective force of considerations of which the speaker merely reminds his hearers. Of the first class the great speeches of Burke are the best example; of the second, the speeches of John Bright.

The rhetorical devices by which Burke recommends his themes are many: his diction is ornate; his figures are elaborate; he knows how to use the emphasis of short sentences; when to employ picturesque phrases; when to

use irony, when to use scorn. All seem subordinate to one master-purpose: to make all parts of his speeches—even those which other rhetoricians would have allowed to be only business-like, if not dull—the fuel of an emotional excitement which we do not always feel to be quite natural or spontaneous. However successful Burke's appeals to principle may be, we cannot feel the principles as dissociated, even for an instant, from the orator's version of them.

Bright's speeches make a different impression on us. Bright has the power (which may indeed be a form of rhetoric) of dissociating his principles from his own subjectivity, and making them speak for themselves and persuade by their evident harmony with the nature of things. This power, I say, may be, in part at least, a form of rhetoric: the principles emphasised by the orator may not be as really part of the nature of things as he makes them appear to be; or their effect may be modified by other principles which he ignores. Bright's speeches are often, I think, in this sense rhetorical. But, even so, the characters of the two classes are sharply distinguishable.

There is a larger number of literary sermons in English than of literary speeches. The preacher is impelled towards rhetoric by three special motives: (1) reverence; (2) certitude; (3) urgency.

(1) Reverence, the sense that his chief themes are God, and a personal relationship between God and man, may prompt the preacher to either of two kinds of rhetoric, the rhetoric of magniloquence or that of careful plainness and simplicity.

(2) The preacher speaks under a special sense of certitude, which may or may not prompt to rhetoric. It will not do so

if the certainty of the verities seems to make them matters of course. In that case the preacher will think rhetoric superfluous. On the other hand, his sense of certitude as to matters which are both supremely important and subject to opposition may be felt as the sense of possessing a precious secret, which, in order to be shared and appreciated, must be made intelligible and attractive, and brought decisively home. He will then be tempted to over-emphasis, over-amplification, excursive illustration, and, possibly, to controversial misrepresentation and injustice. Characteristic of this rhetoric of certitude is the attempt to make a *reductio ad absurdum* of opposition, by putting questions which can be answered only in the sense of the questioner.¹

(3) The sense of urgency, the preacher's feeling that he is speaking "as dying unto dying men," obviously predisposes to almost every form of rhetoric.

With the oration ought to be classed all such writing as is distinctly hortatory, *i.e.* consists chiefly of injunctions and warnings. In English literature of a high class such writing is rare; but it is conspicuous, and has been very influential in the works of Carlyle and Ruskin.

So important is rhetoric in connexion with the oration that all questions of stylistic fitness for the orator turn on its presence and nature, its quality and quantity. Is it, we ask, possible to maintain that, alike in secular speeches and in sermons, the less rhetoric there is the better? The answer would seem to be that, even from a literary point of view, the less rhetoric there seems to be, the better. There is, in truth, no difference between the literary appreciation of a speech or sermon and the original

¹ *E.g.* "Shall we say that all this happened by chance? Is man as one of the beasts that perish?"

appreciation of it by the audience. For both persuasion is the object and the test; and the more persuasion can be effected by the mere "manifestation of the truth" (even though really made with careful art) the better. What in this respect may be said of orations proper, may be said also of hortatory prose. And, in addition, it may be said of it that, occurring, as it generally does, occasionally or episodically in an author's writings, it is on a lower level than the rest. Stylistically it is based on the fiction that the writer is speaking to auditors, and thus fails in perfect sincerity.

2. *The Treatise*.—Treatise is a very wide word, and must be made to embrace a great variety of compositions. We must, in fact, take it as referring to every written prose composition which cannot be classed as history, biography, essay, novel, or journalism, and as denoting works as dissimilar as Mill's *Political Economy* and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*; Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* and Newman's *Grammar of Assent*—all such works, in short, as give systematic exposition of a definite complex theme which is not claimed by history in the strict sense of the word, *i.e.* the biography of political societies.

Such being the wide province of the treatise-maker, a good deal that determines the style appropriate to the treatise comes clearly into view at once. We at once see that all the compositions thus defined are pre-eminently utilitarian, *i.e.* are typical prose. For such expositions of definite complex themes as Mill's *Political Economy* and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living* are made (a glance shows it) for the reader's benefit, and this although *Holy Living* contains incidentally what we may call prose-poetry.

The fitnesses of scientific writing, therefore, are the fitnesses of typical prose. First among them are the central and all-controlling fitnesses of prose, viz., *logic* and *lucidity*. Every treatise ought to be logical, both as a whole and in each of its parts; *i.e.* the thoughts which it expresses are parts of a rational order, and should be shown as such. The writer, therefore, must argue logically, and construct coherently, and expound exhaustively. Again, he must be predominantly *lucid*. If a theme cannot be expounded clearly, it is better not to try to expound it at all. If parts of it are obscure, let their obscurity be (so to say) clearly shown. In scientific prose, as such, suggestiveness, so precious in other forms of composition, is hardly admissible, and its opposite, explicitness, is an ever-present obligation.

So important are logic and lucidity among the fitnesses of scientific prose, that other fitnesses are derivatives of them. Logic ought to govern the structure; lucidity ought to regulate the parts. Thus, *e.g.*, the words chosen ought to be simple and colloquial enough to secure the reader's attention and comprehension, and long enough or foreign enough to secure comprehension where the simple and native and colloquial are inadequate. *Relevancy* ought to be regarded as a stern obligation throughout; and digression a dangerous vice. The ever-active tendency to metaphor, careless illustration, and over-pressed or misleading parallelism, ought to be carefully restrained or sternly repressed. The treatise, as we here understand it, is based on *knowledge* and it is intended to give knowledge. Therefore it is knowledge that the expression must convey—knowledge, and not the mere opinion which may be enforced, or the ignorance which may be masked, by rhetoric.

One great and comprehensive stylistic danger besets the scientific treatise—the danger of being without literary attractiveness, almost without literary character. Popular speech is full of the antithesis of “scientific” and “literary”; an antithesis which is useful in many ways, but which the student of Style cannot admit as an antithesis *within literature*. Many scientific treatises are mere extended note-books of original research, in which the expression is but a jargon of specialists.¹ For the student of Style such books (whatever may be the value of the research and its results) are simply pieces of bad literary workmanship. They are in book-form only to degrade it; and we cannot allow that their scientific merit gives them any right to do so. There is nothing in the nature of things to prevent scientific processes and results of every kind from being set forth in a “literary” manner, *i.e.* with (in addition to logic and lucidity) the careful verbal choice, the syntactical flexibility and variety, the regard for balance and cadence, the reverence for the noblest and best sanctioned forms of expression, which determine high rank in other kinds of prose.

3. *The History and Biography*.—The historian essays a very hard and complex task, one of the hardest which can fall to any writer of prose. Its hardness consists in the fact that it is partly “scientific” and partly “literary,” and that neither part can be safely neglected by any writer who would really succeed as an historian. The historian

¹ A striking instance of this is afforded by many recent works in biblical criticism, with their surfeit of contractions and initials—their “J E.’s” and “Q.’s” and “N. T.’s,” etc.—at every turn, whereby, with a strange irony, some of the most august themes are threatened with the permanent incubus of a specially hideous and unbecoming slang.

must sift and weigh evidence with a scrupulosity which is purely scientific; he must sternly refuse to exhibit as fact what is either fancy or conjecture; he must subject his authorities to an enlightened and unsparing criticism. Along with this scientific and critical gift there must go intellectual qualities of a high and unusual kind. The historian must have power of imagination sufficient to enable him to sympathise with and understand periods far removed from his own. He must have the power of truthfully presenting characters with whom he cannot sympathise, and of stating opinions and allowing for beliefs which are not his; and he must do these things without any unnatural suppression of his own individuality and convictions.

What effect are all these *desiderata* to have on the historian's style? So far as he has to be scientific and critical, the stylistic problems he has to face are not very hard. To estimate justly, to reason correctly, to express results clearly, are all that are required of him. But his use of sympathy, imagination, and impartiality in his narrative impose several expressional obligations on him beyond what mere science requires. And a still more important determinant is the fact that it is *narrative* which the historian has to write. It is, therefore, before all things appropriate to the historian's style that it should have narrative power. When we consider wherein narrative power as commonly understood consists, we shall feel at once that it means, at least, that the teller of a story must be able to make it interesting. It is not enough that the story should be true; it must be told so as to arrest and enchain the reader of average intelligence. It is not enough that effects should be traced to the right causes; they must

be so traced that the sequence of events on the historian's pages shall show something both of the dignity and the vividness of the events themselves. Whatever, therefore, may legitimately help to make narrative interesting may be, and ought to be, used by the historian. It may be rapidity of movement; it may be frequent changes in method of presentment; whatever it is, so long as it is restrained by the all-controlling necessity of fidelity to evidence, it is a main part of the historian's proper expressional outfit. Again, it ought to be an *imaginative* style. Here we must walk warily. Imaginative and imagination are dangerous words to use; one must use them, often, in different senses. Here they refer, as we have just seen, to the necessity which lies on the historian to understand sympathetically periods remote from his own, and characters different from himself and his heroes. Such sympathy involves imagination; because, the essence of imagination seems to lie in the use of *suggestion*. Now suggestion is a process of *comparison* and *contrast*; one thing suggests another by its likeness or unlikeness to it. When the historian deals with past events, obsolete social conditions, and repulsive personalities, he is comparing and contrasting the present with the past, he is comparing and contrasting the actual with his ideal, in a way essentially similar to that in which the poet or novelist "creates" (as the phrase goes) "his imaginary world." It is a mistake to think, as many people are apt to think, that that imaginary world has value and interest in proportion to its novelty, that is, its want of relation to the "real" world. The poet and novelist, quite as much as the historian, have to compare and contrast what they have not experienced with what they have experienced;

and the value of their common work in this respect depends on its relation to experience, not on its want of such relation. The historian, then, ought to use imagination; and wherein is his style to be imaginative? What are the resources of imaginative expression? To this question no very definite answer can be given; nor are we in this chapter dealing with any details of expression. But we may say that whatever helps vividness of realisation on the part of the reader; the representation of the past as if it were present, the distant as if it were near, the dead as if they were alive, is imaginative expression such as the historian may fitly use. Again, the historian ought to have a strong *sense of proportion* to guide his style. He must not represent events as being either greater or smaller than in fact they were; he must not, so to say, make pets of certain events or facts; he must not develop them at the expense of other events or facts. He must not be short when he ought to be long, and long when he ought to be short; above all, he must be emphatic when, and only when, emphasis is needed to impress on the reader truths which would suffer by the lack of it. The historian must always be to a large extent *a biographer*. He may not, indeed, be required to write anybody's life from birth to death; but he must constantly deal with what is the essential problem of biography: individual conduct in relation to circumstances. He must, therefore, always be ready to temper the language of eulogy with the language of criticism; and to show the art of vivid and sympathetic portraiture. Another obligation lying on the historian is the need of *clearness*. His main object, indeed, may be said to be to make distinct events and characters which are blurred by lapse of time and confusion of testimony; or

(if we like to use another metaphor) to place in their true order what he finds in a disorderly mass. He ought, therefore, to aim at definiteness of statement within the limits of the evidence at his disposal; and should never either from cloudy statement or faulty arrangement expose his reader to the perplexity which comes from confusion as to times, places, and other details. Lastly, the historian must be *learned*. By this it is not meant only that he must be thoroughly conversant with the direct sources of his own proper political subject, but also that, his subject having such multifarious relations, he must possess a multifarious knowledge. In every episodic excursion, therefore, which his main theme may require, he must be ready with well-instructed expression, and never write in guess or at haphazard.

It is part of the historian's business, I have said, to be a biographer. It would be almost equally true to say that it is a biographer's business to be an historian. And indeed it is desirable, from the point of view of Style, to treat biography as a kind or branch of history, and to say a few words about it here.

First, as to the connexion between history and biography. This is by no means a mere casual analogy, but rather an essential identity in many respects. For the essential subject-matter of history is the political society or State, its origin, its growth, its virtues, faults, decline, and death; and only when the historian keeps constantly before him the corporate unity—almost the quasi-individuality—of the State, does he fully succeed. And to do this is to write a kind of biography.

If we look back on the qualifications of the historian, we shall see that they all ought to be possessed by the

biographer. He ought to have narrative skill, imagination, sense of proportion, clearness, learning, *i.e.*, adequate knowledge of his subject in all his or her bearings. Chief among the qualifications stands imagination in the sense of *sympathetic realisation*. The biographer has to realise by making alive; and this not only by recalling the life of one that is dead, but (which is a harder task) by giving organic unity and a living pulse to a mass of scattered and often disinterred details. He cannot do this without such sympathy as the historian must possess; the power of conceiving and understanding personality different from his own, and presenting it without any illusions due to his egoism, or injustice due to his prejudices.

Of both history and biography it has to be said that they may be written from different points of view and in different ways. This is obvious as regards history; its labours are so complex and vast that they call for division. The case as to biography is somewhat different. The varieties of biography arise from different conceptions of the biographer's duty towards his subject, and his readers. In the model English biography, for example, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, that duty was thought of as the complete exhibition in the annals of his life of a supremely wise and good man. It was felt that the public ought to possess, as far as possible, every word of wisdom, and learn of every trait of goodness, of which the hero was the author. In other biographies, almost equally eminent, *e.g.* Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, the object has been, from the truthful critic's point of view, to make a study of partial or ignored aspects of the subject. In the latter case the attitude of the biographer is much more judicial than in the former. He regards his subject as a person interesting enough to

have a biography, but his feeling about him need not go much beyond that. His enterprise is often, perhaps usually, prompted by the belief that erroneous conceptions of the subject are current, and that they ought to be corrected. Therefore, he carefully selects and marshals his evidence so as to establish the truth, and nothing more nor less than the truth, about his hero.

Biographers are, very naturally, and more than other writers, self-conscious about their style, and they often refer to their self-consciousness. They are especially apt to speak of their anxiety to suppress themselves, and allow their subjects to be (as it is often put) "their own biographers," *i.e.* through their letters and recorded sayings. On the whole, perhaps, this is a false modesty, based on a misconception of the inevitable responsibility of authorship. Careful thought will show us that a dead man cannot be his own biographer. A biographer may, indeed, collect a mass of letters and reported conversations, and string them on an annalistic or other chronological thread; but he will not thus produce a biography of any literary value, and he will only exhibit himself as an incompetent craftsman. His book will be at the best, not a work of art, but a convenient store of material for future artists. We cannot fail to realise that, whatever may be the scale of the work, and whether it is written from the hero-worshipping point of view of a Boswell, or the critical point of view of Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, biography cannot fail, and must not fail, to express the subjectivity and skill of the biographer. The biographer must start with a clear and living image; and he must so collect and so select, so comment and connect and arrange, as to confirm that image to himself and his readers. The essential matter is the

clearness and life of the image which is the product of the biographer's imagination. We can easily support this view from, *e.g.*, Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, but Boswell's *Johnson* is equally a case in point. It is a great biography, not because it is exhaustive and full of detail, but because Boswell's image of Johnson has the clearness and life with which only an artist imagines. Mere hero-worship, such as moved Boswell, is no guarantee of such imaginative clearness; and therefore neither admiration nor adoration, even when fortified by long intimacy, qualifies a writer to be a biographer.

For the rest, a biographer's style ought to show much of the versatility of the historian's, and especially his command of narrative, description, and discussion (where it is required) of evidence.

Autobiography is a very peculiar kind of biography. Its peculiarity consists in its essential quality of egoism; and the chief stylistic problem which it raises may be stated thus: to what extent does the egoism of autobiography act like the egoism of poetry, and exempt the writer from the ordinary obligations of prose? That it does so to some extent seems obvious. If a man chooses to write a book about himself and his life, and can get readers, there seems no strong reason why he should not write in any style he likes. He may, *e.g.*, take himself seriously and (so to speak) disinterestedly; he may be able to detach himself from himself, and present himself, so detached, to his readers. In this case he will be writing biography, and his work will have the obligations of biography. Or he may, on the other hand, take himself humorously or fantastically; he may indulge self-consciousness to the utmost; and in this case his work may be a kind of rhapsody or prose-poem to which

few or none of the obligations of prose, or at least of biographical prose, apply. It will rather take its chance with the prose of the essayist or the novelist, which we have not yet considered.

4. *The Essay*.—The essay is one of the most interesting and important forms of prose literature; and it is not altogether easy to describe and limit it. Can we briefly characterise the essay-nature as we find it in the essay proper, in Montaigne, Bacon, Addison, Charles Lamb, or R. L. Stevenson? It is, we see at once, a short complete prose composition, treating, generally, of a single theme in a desultory and incalculable manner, which gives special scope to the individuality of the writer. Shortness, though typical, is perhaps hardly essential; as there may be a long lyrical poem, there may, exceptionally, be a long and yet true essay, *e.g.* Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, or Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. As long as the desultoriness and incalculability of the treatment remain, the essay-nature may be said to be there. What, then, are the main and essential characteristics of the essayist? Perhaps we may be content with mentioning one as all-inclusive, namely *egoism*. We ought to regard the essay, short or long, as an appropriate prose medium of that self-expression and self-relief which, as we have seen, finds its best vehicle in poetry. If so, it is evident that the essayist has a larger range of appropriate style than any other prose writer; that, in fact, the practical boundlessness of range, which belongs to the poet, belongs to the essayist also. It is hardly possible to think of any theme inherently unsuited to the writer of essays; and it is hardly possible to think of any mode or aspect of expression which is unfit for his use. The most limpid and unpretending clear-

ness of diction, that "beautiful simplicity" which Addison showed to be possible to great genius; the utmost and most various caprice of wit, humour, pathos, tenderness; the most deliberate effort after pure beauty of thought and sound; the most terse brevity; the most unstinted garrulity; none of these is in itself unfit. All, in short, that literary egoism may do, may be done by the essayist, subject only to two conditions: (1) that he contrives to be interesting; (2) that in his most wayward and rhapsodical efforts he stops short of the rhythm proper to poetry alone.

It is, therefore, on the whole with the essay that we must class that variety of prose to which we have had often to refer, namely, prose-poetry; for prose-poetry is none other than rhapsodical egoistic utterance, just stopping short of the rhythm proper to poetry alone. Prose-poetry may, of course, occur episodically in the treatise, the history, or the novel; but, when it does, we may almost say that the writer becomes an essayist (if not a preacher) for the nonce. The typical prose-poem is an essay; it is Lamb's *Dream-Children*, or De Quincey's *Dream Fugue* on Sudden Death.

We must recognise that the name essay is given to compositions which have no characteristics of the essay proper except comparative shortness, compositions such as Macaulay's *Essays*, or Carlyle's *Miscellanies*. Such essays are merely short histories, biographies, or treatises (for a long critical study like Carlyle's essay on Scott is really a short treatise); and they hardly existed before the nineteenth century, when the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* initiated a new kind of periodical, in which long historical, biographical, and critical articles might be published. The stylistic fitnesses of such essays are, on the

whole, those of the larger classes to which they belong. About the critical essay only, a word should perhaps here be said.

Literary criticism in England was, in the form of the short treatise (Sidney, Puttenham), one of the achievements of the Elizabethan age; but its most powerful representatives before the nineteenth century were Dryden, Addison, and Samuel Johnson. Dryden's criticisms for the most part took the form of disquisitory prefaces to his own works; Addison's were occasional essays, like his other essays in the *Spectator* and other periodicals. Johnson, partly by his reviews of books in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and elsewhere, partly by the Introduction to his edition of Shakespeare, and still more by his *Life of Savage* and *Lives of the Poets*, was the true parent of the critical essay, afterwards perfected by Macaulay, Carlyle, and others. By his literary genius he showed how, in a composition too brief to need division into chapters or other sections, the exposition of a literary life and performance might be made interesting and adequate. Two motives regulated such essays, one much stronger than the other. The weaker motive was biographical; the stronger was critical, *i.e.* the desire to appraise literary or other famous achievement, and assign the author his proper rank. It is as criticism that such essays as we are now considering stand or fall. Are there any conspicuous fitnesses of critical style as shown within the limits of an essay?

(1) It ought to be *definite* and *lucid*. A critical essay, however relatively long it may be, is not long enough to allow beating about the bush, vague talk about men and their works, or the mere statement of problems without any attempt at solving them. No one is warranted to

appraise with brevity unless his judgments are definite and may be expressed with clearness.

(2) The critic must deal *sympathetically* with his subject. This is very obvious where the estimate is favourable; but it is less so where the writer is obliged to depreciate or condemn. Yet, as on the dramatist and the historian, there lies on the critical essayist the obligation to ignore, while he is passing judgment, or preparing to pass judgment, his own individual antipathies and prejudices, and to make the fullest possible allowance for good motive and high merit. It is only in expecting the best of his subject that the critic can be trusted to decide against him or his work, and to depress him or it in public estimation. And this obligation to sympathy is specially incumbent on the essayist because of the shortness and small scale of his composition. In a more extended work the writer has greater opportunities of attaining to justice in the long run. Within the dimensions of an essay, the critic must never, even temporarily, fall short of the justice which is impossible without sympathy.

(3) The author of a critical estimate in essay-form should criticise *according to principles*. Criticism is of an inferior order which is a mere expression of individual preference or approval. The critic must be in touch with standards of action, thought, and style, before he adjudicates on any action, thought, or style in particular.

(4) Finally, criticism must do full justice to *individuality*. Individuality (sometimes called "originality") often presents itself as sheer novelty; and, though there may be nothing really new under the sun, and though we must believe that principles, properly understood, will cover every novelty, the critic must avoid the temptation of

rejecting or depreciating novelty as such. The insistence on principle and precedent to that extent is pedantry, which must lead to the degradation of criticism. It was such pedantry which made much of Jeffrey's criticism—in many respects so able and so well instructed—so unsatisfactory and so injurious.

If these are the chief *desiderata* of the critical essay, the relative fitnesses of style (besides definiteness and lucidity) seem fairly clear. There ought to be great restraint and great conscientiousness in the use of epigram. There ought to be a great effort to make the performance of the subject of the essay show at its best, by citation of what is best in his writing, or adequate reference to what is best in his action; so that ultimate condemnation, if inevitable, may not be felt to be unfair. There ought to be a constant reference to principles; and yet the essay must show, at every point, as the expression of the writer's individuality, and of a judgment which is really *his*.

5. *The Prose Drama and the Dialogue*.—The prose drama forms a class of literary composition which must by no means be ignored here. As we have already seen, prose may be an element in dramas written mainly in verse; an element not only important, but homogeneous with the verse. But a large number of the most important plays in the English language are written in prose throughout. These plays are exclusively comedies; and, though many of the greatest comedies are, wholly or partially, in verse, there seems to be what we may call a natural affinity between the comic treatment of life and expression in prose. The comic dramatist's outlook on life is generally humorous, satirical, or at least critical; and he realises his ideal, he achieves his best triumphs, when he makes his

characters exhibit themselves in their habitual speech. But it must be habitual speech *made literary*; in other words, it must be not only their speech but his; and herein lies the stylistic problem, not only of the prose drama, but of all fictitious dialogue.

The problem is harder in drama, and in such "imaginary conversations" as Landor's work so called, or Berkeley's *Alciphron* and other dialogues than it is in the dialogue of the novel; for the novelist can eke out or colour or otherwise modify his dialogue by comment, while the other artists cannot. For the dramatist, the problem may be evaded by using verse—as, *e.g.*, Ben Jonson has done; for verse favours the subjectivity with which the dramatist aims at suffusing his dialogue; it enables him easily to blend the ideal with the real. In dramatic prose there is constant competition between realism and idealism for the conveyance of the sense of fitness. Pure realism aims at making each character say precisely what such a character would say in real life; but it is constantly checked and modified by the fact that the characters are fictitious, *i.e. ideal*, and that you may make a fictitious character say what you like, so long as his words are in keeping with his ideal character as you, his creator, conceive it. Your conception will depend on the temper in which you invent; if your temper is humorous, you may inform the speech of your characters with your humour; if your temper is satirical or shrewdly critical, you may dispose their words so as to be vehicles of your scorn, indignation, or wit; if your temper is conventional, you will make their talk rhetorical unreality.

The best dialogue (*i.e.* that which shows the most stylistic fitness) is written in the most congenial style of an author,

who has enough genius to invent characters self-consistent and in agreement with the nature of things. However natural and true to life they may be, they, as talking persons, are his characters, and ought to speak his speech. Scott's management of dialogue is instructive. His Scottish vernacular dialogue is as realistic as dialogue can be, idealised only by the ever-present inspiration of his humour. Much of his English dialogue, on the other hand, is tinged with the conventionality which was part of his nature, and is in itself a form of idealism. In some cases dialogue is determined by the wish to make characters who are really only individualised types speak, and speak only, in character. Utterances of this kind are very common in the novels of T. L. Peacock. The essential thing is that characters should speak according to the conception of them shared by author and readers. Fidelity to that conception is the true realism required; and nothing can ensure excellence in dialogue except the sincerity and firmness with which the characters are felt and seen by the writer.

6. *The Novel*.—The comparatively late appearance of the novel in the history of literature,¹ and the enormous number of contemporary novels which have no likelihood of survival, must not blind us to the very great importance and dignity of fiction as a form of prose. Its importance and dignity depend on a fact which we may state in more ways than one. We may say that the novel gives more scope to a writer's imagination than any other form of prose. Or we may say that it favours creation or invention more than any other form of prose. Or we may say, finally,

¹ However early we may place the parentage of the English novel, we must retain as its birthdays the appearance of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1741, and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* in 1742.

that, even more than the essay or prose-poem, the novel is the fitting expression of literary egoism in prose.

However we express this differential fact about the novel, we cannot help realising that fiction makes a formidable exception to the rules that prose is utilitarian, and that its primary obligations are logic and lucidity. Whether in its particular case its characteristics are narrative or domestic, it is evident that the novel may be as little utilitarian as the narrative or drama in verse, and that little besides the absence of metre may separate it from such verse. When we look into the history of literature, we see something more. We see (very prominent in English literature) that three methods, singly or variously combined, characterise the novel—the narrative, the dramatic, and what we may call the essayistic. Now, there are some reasons, not wholly fanciful, for finding analogy between the essay in prose and the lyric in poetry; and similarly we are not without justification in seeing in the novel an exact analogue of poetry in its three most famous divisions.

We see, also, two other things. The first is that the rise of the English novel proper, the novel of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett, followed at no great distance the decline of the drama which had reigned with such power from the Elizabethans to Congreve, Fielding himself seeming to mark the transition by forsaking comedy for prose fiction. The other thing is that the great recent vogue of prose fiction, which may be said to have begun with the appearance of the *Waverley Novels*, has been accompanied by a great decline in the vogue of long narrative poems, Scott himself seeming to mark the transition by turning from narrative poetry to prose fiction. In some sense, therefore, prose fiction is a substitute for, or allotropic

form of, poetry and drama: hence the dignity and importance which we must claim for it.

Its essential condition, the interest of observing human behaviour, lies deep in the constitution of human nature. The wish to look on at the doings of men and women may be gratified in other ways than by the novel as we understand it in these days; it may be gratified in the theatre; by the newspaper; by interesting biographies and histories; nay, apart from literature, it may, especially for some temperaments, be sufficiently gratified by one's experiences in society. But, besides the essential human element in the novel, there are other elements, which, if not essential, are very important in the modern work of prose fiction, and which go far towards explaining its present vogue. There is, as we have seen, *dramatic interest*. A novel may realise itself and interest its readers by presentation and analysis of single characters; it is conceivable that it might succeed as the autobiography or soliloquy of a hermit; but, for the most part, it demands the collision and interplay of characters, and their presentation in dialogue. An important part of dramatic interest centres in what is called *plot*, *i.e.* the system of events within which the characters are placed; the action of circumstance upon conduct and the re-action of conduct upon circumstance. Again, there is *narrative interest*. The incidents must not only be recognised by the reader as logically interdependent and dramatically fit; they must be shown in an inevitable and attractive sequence. In metaphorical language, one may say that the machinery of the fiction must not be merely looked upon as ingeniously fit for its work, but must be seen in noiseless, well-oiled, unchecked movement. There is the element of *scenery*. In many novels, and

perhaps in all the richest and best novels, the characters show themselves and their doings against a background of scenery. It may be a village-street or the quiet fields of a farm; it may be the splendours of London or Paris; the glories of some land of mountain and lake, or the sea and its ships. Always it is an important element, not only because it gives what we may call colour to the novel and so adds to the reader's pleasure, but because it gives the writer an opportunity of dealing with one of the most interesting things in the world, namely, the relation between Nature and human nature. An important element, again, is *humour*. Humour is a word almost impossible of definition; in literature it stands for a way of looking at men and things by which those aspects of them come into view which tend to produce wholly genial laughter in those who look. It is, of course, a phase of intelligence; it requires insight at once keen and fine; it requires a comprehensive sympathy. The novelist who is without it or who has it in very small measure may attain many successes; but his work runs a great risk of being blind, narrow, and dull. Lastly, there is *imagination*. It may seem that so great a quality ought to have been mentioned first. It is, however, not without a reason that it is made to come last. We have seen that it, like humour, is difficult to define, and that, indeed, it means many different, if kindred, things. What does it mean for the novelist? Not merely, not chiefly, that his work is fiction, that his characters and events are "imaginary." It really means for him what it means for the historian. For the historian, we have seen that it means, fundamentally, *sympathy*; *i.e.* the power of understanding and doing justice to things and people remote from his own experience. And so it is with the novelist. All the elements

of the novel, indeed, its concern with human behaviour, its idealisation of human experience, its development of character in relation to circumstances and scenery, may be regarded as involving imagination, in its deepest sense of sympathy, comparison, and suggestion.

It follows from all this that the novelist's expressional outfit, the range of his style, is a large one. The whole which he produces is more complex than that of any other kind of prose writer except the historian; and the novelist has one difficulty more than the historian inasmuch as the historian's events and characters are, in an important sense, given to him ready-made, while those of the novelist have to be invented. The novelist, in addition to the essential grace of clear and interesting narrative, needs many other dissimilar gifts to enable him to reach the ends which his ideal prescribes. He needs the sense of wholeness and finish by which alone he can work out his plot to a satisfactory *dénouement*. He needs the dramatic sympathy by which alone his characters may seem real; and especially the power of writing dialogue, of putting the appropriate words into their mouths. They must not be mere *replicas* of his own egoism; they must not speak in the author's idiom only, but in that of themselves and their age as well. He needs the expressional outfit of the humorist; the delicate suggestion of the amusing; the restrained, tactful, and good-natured insistence on personal peculiarity; the patience with, and insight into, the humbler aspects of the lives of men and animals; power over irony; sympathy with jest. He needs, lastly, the gift of picturesque exposition and diction; the power of showing his scenes and characters to his readers, so as to make them both visible (as it were) and interesting. He must have the art of choosing wisely

the details on which he dwells; he must have command of accurate and significant epithets and of illuminating descriptive phrases. If he is describing natural scenery, he may have, and must have, a large share of the poet's command of figurative and suggestive language. He ought to be, to some extent, a prose-poet.

6. *Journalism*.—The journalist has many affinities with the essayist, as we understand him here. As a rule the journalist's work, like the essayist's, is brief, undivided into sections, incalculable as to treatment, allowing of considerable desultoriness of method. But beyond such matters the resemblance does not go. If the essential and all-inclusive characteristic of the essayist is egoism, that of the journalist may be said to be utilitarianism. The business of the journalist proper, the writer for daily or weekly papers, is to produce rapidly comment or generalisation on contemporary persons or current events for the immediate comprehension of the ordinary reader. With such an object before him, the journalist must not think of self-expression or self-relief; for pathos and tenderness he is not likely to have much need; his humour must be very strictly restrained; the pursuit of pure beauty is not for him. He needs, primarily, *adequate knowledge* of the matters on which, at such short notice, he has to comment. He needs the gift of *clear intelligible statement*. He needs a gift of *logic*. He needs *rapidity of mental movement* and of *translation of thought into language*. He needs *conviction*, real or simulated. He needs *sympathy with contemporary life*.

Historically, journalism is of recent growth; and its latest developments are very recent indeed. One of these needs special consideration. "The journalist proper," we have said, is "the writer for daily or weekly papers." But

recently there has been a very marked tendency for the characteristic journalist's style to show itself in more extended forms, in the essay, or even the treatise. We often encounter long "articles" or books, in which the fitnesses of style which we have been at pains to discover and describe are set at defiance, and which exhibit only the ephemeral arts and effects which the writer for daily and weekly papers may legitimately use and produce. We find mere sparkle where there ought to be sustained warm glow; paradox where paradox is unscrupulous; jesting where there ought to be reverence; dogmatism for modest conjecture; rhetoric where rhetoric is illegitimate; irruptions of egoism, which serve no higher purpose than self-advertisement. All this, though easily explicable, is (we must conclude) hurtful to literature. It is easily explicable; for the daily and weekly journals suit readers too busy or lazy to think for themselves in an age of rapid movement and a world of electric communication; and the style which makes such journals readable quite naturally extends itself beyond the limits of the journal, so as, if possible, to be read there. "What is successful in one direction," the clever journalist naturally thinks, "will be successful in others"; and, from a commercial point of view, he does not think amiss. But from the point of view of the dignity of literature, we must hold that he is doing harm. The fitnesses of style with which we are dealing in this chapter are, we believe, grounded in the nature of things; and, if that is so, any breach or contradiction of them involves literary error or decadence.

And now it is time to have done with generalities, and to deal with the essential elements of Style, one by one. And we must begin with Words.

CHAPTER VI

WORDS

ALTHOUGH words are the stuff, the raw material, of expression, it is obviously not true that the choice of single words is the first stage of composition. A writer does not choose words and then combine them in a piece of prose or verse, as a builder chooses stones or bricks and then combines them in a house. In almost every case, the process of composition, of expression, begins with a conception, either of a literary whole, or of an instalment of a literary whole. Similarly, the architect's conception precedes the builder's work. And not only does the writer preconceive like the architect, but he only to a very limited extent chooses words as the builder takes stones or bricks.

Yet we may well begin the study of composition with a study of vocabulary. While it is true that a writer, especially a writer of prose, thinks (before he writes or as he writes) in phrases or sentences, his vocabulary is his stock-in-trade; and, when he writes his phrases and sentences, he is really—unconsciously, or subconsciously, it may be, and certainly, in most cases, with extreme rapidity—choosing words. Some writers, whether in prose or verse, seem to choose their words with great care; others have such a rushing movement, such an apparent inevitableness of expression, that we feel there can have been hardly any conscious choice of words at all. In some

kinds of poetry and prose, a writer may pick and fit his words almost like a mosaicist. When the predominant ideals of a utilitarian writer are logic and lucidity, the deliberate choice and separate consideration of words may be at a minimum. When we say that a writer's chief ideal is logic, we mean that he grasps his subject (so to speak) by the thought in it, that he is possessed and preoccupied by the thought. When we say that his ideal is lucidity, we mean that his grasp of the thought will give him the power of finding the fitting expression in all its parts without search or delay. But now let us introduce a different ideal, that of *accuracy*. For accuracy everything may depend on the choice of this word rather than that; and the writer bent on being accurate may have to play the mosaicist almost as slowly and fastidiously as the prose-poet.

The extent to which a writer chooses his words with deliberation bears on the individual experience of the artist; and with that students of Style have very little to do. They study vocabulary, because, in much writing, words have an effect separable from that of clauses and sentences. Constantly in verse, and frequently in prose, we pause to remark the fitness or unfitness, the beauty, oddity, harshness, or what not, of this or that single word, though the main effect of what we read is of course produced by clauses and sentences.

The effect of single words in poetry of all kinds hardly needs illustration.

"And though that he was *worthy*, he was *wys*,
And of his port as *meke* as is a *mayde*." ¹

"And on its *blade* and *dudgeon*, gouts of blood." ²

¹ Chaucer, Prol. to *Canterbury Tales*, 67-8.

² Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act II. Sc. 1.

" Nothing of him that doth *fade*
But doth suffer a *sea-change*." ¹

" A pitchy cloud
Of locusts, *warping* on the Eastern wind." ²

" To that *unfeathered, two-legged* thing, a son." ³

" *Molest* her ancient, solitary reign." ⁴

" A *fingering* slave!
One that would peep and *botanise*
Upon his mother's grave!" ⁵

" At one *stride* comes the dark." ⁶

" The landscape *winking* through the heat." ⁷

" And all their past came *wailing* in the wind,
And all their future *thundered* in the sea." ⁸

In all these instances, taken from poets of different periods and styles (and how abundant such instances are the most inexperienced readers of poetry know), the words in italics have single and separate effectiveness distinguishable from that of the phrases and sentences in which they occur.

In prose the effectiveness of mere words is more limited. Here the main effect is produced by clauses and sentences; and readers would look with some justifiable suspicion on prose writers whose choice of words was so *outré* as to attract much attention to single words. Yet we must

¹ Shakespeare, *Tempest*, Act I., Sc. 2.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

³ Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*.

⁴ Gray, *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*.

⁵ Wordsworth, *A Poet's Epitaph*.

⁶ Coleridge, *Ancient Mariner*.

⁷ Tennyson, *In Memoriam*.

⁸ Swinburne, *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

never forget two things; first, that prose may approach very near poetry in many respects, including choice of striking words. Secondly, we must bear in mind that the culture of correctness of thought and clearness of expression, always the main ideals of prose, may be greatly assisted by the character or the prominence—the detached effect—of single words.

Let us seek for a few illustrations of this effect in various kinds of prose.

“Now since these dead bones have already outlasted the living ones of Methuselah . . . and quietly rested under the *drums* and *tramlings* of three conquests.”¹

“Sometimes five Imprimaturs are seen together dialogue-wise within the *piazza* of one Title-page.”²

“For two hours before reaching Chester . . . I saw held up aloft before my eyes that matchless spectacle . . . an *elaborate* and *pompous* sunset *hanging* over the mountains of North Wales.”³

“His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius that the mere lambent sheet-lightning playing under the edge of the summer cloud, does to the electric *death-spark* hid in its *womb*.”⁴

“The hollow of the sky was full of *essential* daylight, *colourless*, and *clean*.”⁵

On the whole we must conclude, that effects which can be rightly regarded as purely and separately verbal are of much greater importance in the best poetry than in the

¹ Sir T. Browne, *Hydriotaphia*.

² Milton, *Areopagitica*.

³ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, Preface to *Jane Eyre*, 2nd ed.

⁵ R. L. Stevenson, *Sire de Maletroit's Door*.

best prose; but that in the latter they are still of great, though imperfectly realised, importance.

Having ascertained these general preliminary facts about words in written composition, we have next to inquire: What principles ought we to take with us as guides when we examine the vocabularies of authors? In what classes are the words we find to be arranged, so that they may become for the student of Style real objects of knowledge, and be put in the most favourable light for being considered and understood?

We shall find a small number of wide classes sufficient for our purpose.

Let me suggest such a number: it does not pretend to be exhaustive.

I. We may inquire as to whether a writer's words are, for the most part, *long* or *short*, *polysyllabic* or *oligosyllabic*. So many words derived from Greek and Latin are long, and so many words of Old English or other Teutonic descent are short, that we are tempted to make our classes Romance (let us say) and Teutonic, rather than long and short. But a little consideration shows us, on the one hand, that many short words are Romance and many long ones Teutonic; and, on the other (and this is the important point), that writers choose words with regard to their length rather than their etymology.

In poetry we find, in our chief English classics, a great preponderance of oligosyllabic over polysyllabic words; and the effect of the preponderance is enhanced by its evident spontaneity. Careful study of the best English poetry shows that in verse the strength and beauty—the expressiveness, in the fullest sense, of the language—lies, for the most part, in its short words; and that it is only

now and then that such long polysyllables as “deracinate” or “incarnadine”—words which are of the very stuff of the Latin language—suggest themselves for satisfactory poetic expression.

It is somewhat otherwise with prose, where the proportion of polysyllabic words is much larger. In poetry there is what we may call a common form which restricts the range of expression, and makes it possible, for example, to cultivate oligosyllabic words, if the poet so desires. In prose, on the contrary, there can hardly be said to be any such common form. The possible subject-matter of prose, even of what we can call distinctly “literary” prose, is so great, the tendencies of prose are so various and divergent, that a writer does himself no good but harm when he deliberately restricts his verbal choice; when, for example, he constantly rejects polysyllabic words.

It is thus evidently difficult to arrive at general conclusions about length of words in the vocabularies of prose. There have been periods when polysyllabic words, and other periods when oligosyllabic words, have prevailed. It would perhaps be a safe generalisation to say that the vocabulary of the most famous English prose has been oligosyllabic, with some very notable exceptions. Interrupting the normally oligosyllabic tendency (from Malory to the present time) there has occasionally appeared a tendency to cultivate polysyllabic words. This (evident in such writers as Sir Thomas Browne, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Samuel Johnson) has often resulted from a “classical” ideal in expression; an aim, *i.e.*, to use words derived from Greek and Latin (especially Latin), and to domesticate the long involved Ciceronian sentence in English.

Sometimes fashion and a conventional sense of dignity have proscribed short words. Within the first half of the nineteenth century the contrast between a polysyllabic and an oligosyllabic vocabulary was sometimes sharp. We shall feel it at its sharpest if we read in immediate succession the two descriptions of storm in the seventh chapter of *The Antiquary* (1815) and the fifty-fifth chapter of *David Copperfield* (1850). Scott's preference for longer words seems evidently due to a theory, perhaps unconsciously held, as to the dignity of picturesque prose, a theory unknown to, or ignored by, Dickens.

In poetry and prose alike, *pomp* often requires polysyllabic words. We ought to conceive pomp clearly, and carefully distinguish it from *sublimity*. Both are forms of *grandeur*; and both are legitimate in literature, as in other arts. Pomp belongs to the externals of grandeur; sublimity to its inward essence. Where the inward essence of grandeur is given in literature, where style is sublime, as, for example, in so much of the Bible, it need not be, and it hardly ever is, polysyllabic (*cf.* Ezekiel xxxvii. *et seq.*). But where style is pompous, as in the best literature it often is, the writer instinctively uses many long, generally Romance, words. Thus, in the murder scene in *Macbeth* (Act II. Sc. 2), the bulk of the poetry has the grandeur of sublimity, and is conspicuously oligosyllabic, *e.g.* :—

“ Still it cried *Sleep no more!* ” etc.

But, in Macbeth's speech after the knocking at the gate, he passes from sublimity to pomp, and we get a polysyllabic passage :—

“ No, this hand will rather,” etc.

Again, on the morning after the murder, it is pomp, the

externality of grandeur, which gives being to such lines as these:—

" Strange screams of death
And *prophesying with accents terrible*
Of dire combustion and confused events."

Philosophy and Science require a large admixture of polysyllabic words. Philosophers and men of science must use many abstract terms; and the great majority of abstract terms are polysyllabic words derived from Latin and Greek. Abstract terms, *e.g. strength, whiteness*, are, of course, to be found in Teutonic English; but the abstractions with which philosophy constantly deals, *e.g. perception, infinity, metaphysics*, if they are to be expressed in single words, must be expressed in long words, derived from the classical languages. Technical words, again, words such as *faculty, phenomenon, energy*, abound in the vocabulary of science; and the great majority of them are, from the necessity of the case—a necessity of which one may easily convince oneself—classical and polysyllabic.

II. We may inquire whether a writer's words are conspicuously *rare* or *colloquial*. Colloquialism in vocabulary comes mainly from the impulse towards clearness, towards rapid and complete intelligibility, which is one of the strongest and noblest impulses in literature. We may therefore expect those writers whom we have distinguished as "utilitarian" to write colloquially. The tendency to rarity grows out of the impulse towards distinction in expression, an impulse which is no less strong, and may be no less noble, than the impulse towards clearness; and which may be no less an impulse of the utilitarian than of the egoistic or self-revealing writer.

Writers on Style have paid much heed to this important

matter. Aristotle, for example, held that a writer's vocabulary (he was thinking only of poets) should have a sufficient number of unusual words to keep his style from commonness, and not so many as to obscure its clearness. Statements of that kind are rather too general to be of much service to criticism under the conditions of modern literature.

The genius of poetry differs somewhat from that of prose in respect of rarity and colloquialism.

(1) In poetry one of the chief forms of rare vocabulary is the use of archaic words for the sake of heightening poetic effect. Spenser often affected the diction of Chaucer, who lived two centuries before him. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Byron used such words as "Childe," "ne," "whilome," an attempt to reproduce Spenser's vocabulary in a poem written in his metrical stanza. Similar instances will readily occur to any reader of poetry.

One or two lines and stanzas from Tennyson will sufficiently illustrate the combined effect of colloquial and rare words in poetry.

"Taunt me no more; yourself and yours shall have
Free *adit*." ¹

"Let the past be past; let be
Their cancell'd Babels; tho' the rough kex break
The starr'd mosaic." ²

"Where now the seamew pipes, or dives
In yonder *greening* gleam." ³

"Yon hard crescent, as she hangs
Above the wood which *grides* and clangs
Its leafless ribs and iron horns." ⁴

¹ *The Princess*.

³ *In Memoriam*.

² *Ib.*

⁴ *Ib.*

Tennyson is a suitable poet for such illustration because he is much the most self-conscious and deliberately careful verbal artist among recent English poets, and he could handle rare and colloquial words with equal skill.

The strongest arguments in favour of ordinary words as the basis of poetic expression may be found in Wordsworth's *Prefaces* and other essays on poetry; and the case against colloquialism as defended, and especially as practised, by Wordsworth, is powerfully stated in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. According to Wordsworth, "the language . . . of . . . Poetry . . . is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men." Such "selection" obviously opens the door to a large admixture of rarity. The occasional rare words in Tennyson, words like "kex," "greening," "gride," show against an habitual background of words in regular colloquial use. Rarity in poetic vocabulary is of different kinds and seems due to different motives. Rare words may be chosen (as we have seen) for their archaic charm or onomatopœic value. Some, like Shelley's "lampless," seem personal favourites; others, like Southey's "aright and aleft," "deathy," "fiendly," seem chosen, as if for convenience, by an exceptionally well-read man. In all cases there may be, and in the best poetry there always is, the habitual use of a familiar and colloquial vocabulary. There need be no "poetic diction," in the sense of an habitually or conventionally magniloquent one.

(2) In the general effect of prose the single word counts for much less than in verse; and when rare words are used they are conspicuous. In his essay on Style, Thomas de Quincey (himself master of an often admirable and always interesting and distinguished style) insists on what

he calls *idiomatic purity* as an essential of some (though not of all) sorts of good prose style. "The pure racy idiom," says De Quincey, "of colloquial household English . . . must be looked for in the circles of well-educated women not too closely connected with books." In what do the purity and raciness consist? De Quincey tells us negatively: they consist in the absence of "pedantry," of "bookishness," of "spurious refinement," of "fantastic ambition."

Following De Quincey's lines, we are surely safe in concluding that the largest part of a prose writer's vocabulary ought to consist of words belonging to a pure idiom, words chosen without pedantry, bookishness, spurious refinement, or fantastic ambition. For utilitarian writers, who produce the great bulk of prose, writers whose main object is a perfect lucidity, it must be best to use a colloquial vocabulary through which the thought passes like light through clean colourless glass, and to restrict the use of words conspicuous by their rarity within narrow limits.

One point in connexion with utilitarian (or, as we may call it alternatively, "scientific" prose) needs to be insisted on. Rarity and familiarity are relative words, relative to the acquaintance of the reader with the subject-matter of the writings. *E.g.*, words unfamiliar to the general reader may be familiar to the botanist; and the scientific specialist is not necessarily sinning against canons of good style when his vocabulary bristles with difficult words. From a stylistic point of view, however, it is open to question whether the writers of scientific treatises ought not to make every effort to simplify their vocabularies, *i.e.* to avoid as far as possible the use of words repellent, either by their rarity or their cacophony, to general readers.

Much prose is egoistic (or, as we may call it alternatively,

"imaginative"); and, in such prose, the prose, *e.g.*, of the essayist or the prose poet, rare words may play an important and legitimate part. Charles Lamb is a good instance of the central type of essayist, and we find the use of rare words a characteristic feature of his style. Such expressions as the following are frequent:—

"A poor petitionary rogue . . . who, by his *mumping visnomy*, tells you that he expects nothing better."¹ "*Reluct* at the inevitable course of destiny."² De Quincey and Ruskin are typical prose-poets; and in them we find the same feature over and over again. Thus De Quincey:—

"Where little England, in her South-Eastern quarter, now *devolves* so quietly to the sea her sweet pastoral rivulets."³ Or Ruskin: "Far above, in *thunder-blue serration*, stand the eternal edges of the angry Apennine, dark with rolling *impudence* of volcanic cloud."⁴

Here it is desirable to refer briefly to a matter of great practical importance, the use of *slang* words in literary prose. Slang combines the qualities of colloquialism and rarity; in itself it is an excess of colloquialism; while, as part of a literary vocabulary, slang words may have all the effect of rarity.

Every utilitarian style, every style of which the chief aim is influence on the reader, has a tendency to admit slang; for slang is always familiar and often vivid; and a writer eager to act upon his reader may consider that familiarity and vividness are always self-justifying. But of all styles, those of the journalist and popular novelist are the most likely to deal in slang; for the journalist and the

¹ Essays of Elia, *The Two Races of Men*.

² *Ib.* *New Year's Eve*.

³ *System of the Heavens*.

⁴ *Modern Painters*, Vol. IV. Pt. 9, Chap. IV.

popular novelist are the most dependent on immediately finding "a mirror in the answering mind" of the public.

A good many words are in process of transition from slang into "good" English, and such words need not, or need not necessarily, be banished from literature. Much, in such cases, depends on age, and inherent propriety. For example, *house-party*, originally pure slang current among wealthy people, has, through about thirty years' use, made good its literary standing by virtue of its simple fitness, and may now fairly be considered as literary as *housewife* or *dinner-party*. A younger word, of similar origin, but more doubtful rank, is *week-end*. A good writer, even in the higher ranks of journalism or fiction, would fight shy of the word, especially in its quasi-adjectival use (a "week-end party," a "week-end outing"); but he may possibly be pardoned for not doing so twenty years hence. The history of "mob" and "sham," and—in recent times—of "boycott," is the history of such honourable ennobling. Everybody would forbid the use of "ripping" in serious prose as an epithet of praise; many people, probably, would consider that a journalist fell below the proper level of his art, if, in condemning such and such a project, he said that it "spelt ruin."

No practical rule, it would seem, can be laid down for guidance in such matters, except the constant use of a fine tact. The writer works among temptations and high behests; he is bidden to write colloquially and without pedantry; he is bidden with equal authority and insistence to write with purity, dignity, and grace. Withal, especially if he is a journalist, or a popular novelist, he is perpetually tempted to be attractive, vivid, effective at any cost. Nothing can help, nothing can save him but a fine and

unfailing tact; and how can one analyse tact? When he is tempted to use words with a taint of slang let him make certain reflections; are the words (let him, for example, ask) so consecrated by serious literary use as to have practically ceased to be slang? Are they new words expressive of a new, hitherto unnamed fact? Are they in refined, serious, *conversational* use? Are they beautiful to the ear? Are they redolent of noble associations? Are they perfectly and simply expressive? Above all, perhaps, let him ask: Do the exigencies of expression in any particular case really seem to require them? Would not other words, quite dissociated from slang, do equally well? And so on. But only tact can save him.

Single words challenge notice in a composition in proportion to the extent of option possible in their choice; and that option varies with respect to different "parts of speech." It is always more important in poetry than in prose.

The stylistic interest of adjectives is primary in both poetry and prose, because option is at its maximum in their use. Adjectives (with which we may for the moment couple adverbs) express attributes of objects or of actions; and, in any given composition, attributes are of larger and more indefinite number than objects or actions. In poetry the words most likely to challenge notice after adjectives are nouns. In spite of its vast powers and claims, in spite of its egoism and transcendentalism, poetry tends towards the concrete, and the invention of what can be named. When, *e.g.*, it is dealing with abstractions, it often makes them concrete by personifying them.

" Ghostly shapes
May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight, Death the Skeleton
And Time the Shadow." ¹

¹ Wordsworth, *Yew-Trees*.

The imaginative suggestiveness of poetry, which is one of its greatest powers, often operates entirely through nouns, with their qualifying adjectives.

“ Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago.” ¹

Spending her utmost on epithet and object, on person, place, personification, or quality, poetry is driven, in the interests of simplicity, to use simple verbs, and not make too startling her signs of action and suffering. In the poetic structure, the verbs often seem to act as unnoticed supports to the ornamentation of epithet and noun.

The most important kind of adjective in poetry is the epithet,² the adjective (according to the *New English Dictionary*) “indicating some quality or attribute which the speaker or writer regards as characteristic of the person or thing described.”

In estimating the influence of epithets, one cannot make a better beginning than by noticing the effect of epithet in the poems of Homer.

“Then the goddess, *grey-eyed* Athene, turned to other thoughts. She went on her way to the house of *divine* Odysseus. . . . Now *grey-eyed* Athene spoke unto Telemachus and called him from out the *fair-lying* halls . . . Telemachus, thy *goodly-greaved* companions are sitting already at their oars.” ³

¹ Wordsworth, *The Solitary Reaper*.

² Some of the substance, and even some of the words, of what is here said about epithets will be found in an essay on Keats' Epithets contributed by me to *Essays and Studies of Members of the English Association*, vol. 3. (Oxford University Press.)

³ Butcher and Lang's *Odyssey*, 28-9.

Epithets may be surprising or not. One of the first things we notice about an epithet is whether it expresses a familiar or unfamiliar quality. Let the object, for example, be the sea. We may find it called in poetry, and with genuinely poetic effect, the *blue* sea; in which case the poet evidently has no purpose of surprising us. On the other hand, we find a great poet, Swinburne, calling the sea *sharp*; and we suspect that part of his motive is to surprise us. At any rate, the epithet is surprising: sharpness is an exceedingly unfamiliar quality of the sea, so unfamiliar that we may perhaps question its truth. We are arrested and momentarily perplexed, and driven to reflect and inquire—to consider, perhaps, the context of the word or the characteristic vocabulary of the poet, before we accept it as convincing.

Effects of surprising epithet are often to be found in prose as well as poetry. *E.g.* "The moon gleams out, hard and blue, riding among hail-clouds."¹ The epithet "hard," applied to the moon, is surprising, and "blue" is still more so; the words cannot be regarded as successful unless we know what Carlyle meant by them, and also recognise their force as expressing the essential truth and beauty of such an aspect of the moon as Carlyle was imagining.

Some epithets attract notice by their suggestiveness, and thereby show their fitness as agents of imagination. Thus, in Walt Whitman's phrase,

"The huge and thoughtful night,"

the suggestion is boundless. "Huge" suggests the immensity of the physical universe which day, with its distractions and definitions, conceals; and "thoughtful"

¹ From the description of the Battle of Dunbar in Carlyle's *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*.

suggests nothing less than the universe as a whole, which in all ages has communicated with men from the stars, where matter and spirit, thought and thing, seem indistinguishable. In prose, especially imaginative prose, the vaguely suggestive epithet is allowable, but with greater limitation than in verse. Thus in great poetry one may well speak in certain connexions of its being "rich" to die; but one would hardly do so, perhaps, even in imaginative prose. "Who, says the notable humourist . . . who can studiously travel through sheets of leaves now capable of a stretch from the Lizard to the last few poor pulmonary snips and shreds of leagues dancing on their toes for cold."¹ That is prose of the essay, humorous prose, prose of George Meredith; and yet we must call the epithet "pulmonary," of which the merit lies in its suggestiveness, too obscure even for its context, which, by its author's own admission, is "difficult," and tends to "puzzle one's wits."

The emblematic epithet is often very important. The criteria by which we judge emblematic or symbolic epithets are the interest of the qualities transferred on the one hand, and the reasonableness of the emblem chosen to receive them on the other. When Keats calls the stars "earnest," we think only of objective fitness, and not at all of interest or dignity: earnestness is obviously worthy of poetic expression, and we think only of the reasonableness of attributing it to the stars. But when Herrick, in a love-poem, speaks of a basket of fruit offered to his "Phyllis" as containing

"The blushing apple, bashful pear,
And shame-faced plum, all simp'ring there,"

we at once recognise the egoism and arbitrariness of the

¹ G. Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*, Chap. I.

poet's procedure; we see that he is projecting his subjective mood, the lover's mood, on natural objects; and, in our criticism of the epithets, we apply a double standard, asking, (1) is the sentiment of the poem interesting or dignified enough to be allowed to disturb (so to speak) the objective unconcern of Nature; (2) can the expression of that sentiment, "blushing," "bashfulness," "shame-facedness," be reasonably transferred to the fruits mentioned? In answer to the first question we shall agree that love-sentiment may be allowed to involve natural objects, on condition of the fitness of the objects, and the consequent reasonableness of choosing them for the purpose. To the second we answer yes; though not without some consideration and doubt. The three epithets are not homogeneous. "Blushing" is a colour-word, and might, like rosy, be used of an apple without any association with love. "Bashful" and "shame-faced," on the other hand, are words of purely human reference; and when they are transferred to pears and plums we have to look carefully on the poet's reasons. Our acquiescence in his attribution is made more hesitating by the fourth attributive word "simpering." We accept "blushing" as a perfectly fitting and entirely charming epithet, realistically descriptive and coyly suggestive; the other three words we accept, not without grudge, for the lover's and the poet's sake, feeling them to be arbitrary and fantastic, and, in the case of "simpering," not far from the bounds of the weak and the trivial.

Some epithets we distinguish as beautiful. When Milton speaks of the "bearded goat," he uses an epithet to which, if we notice it at all, we assent because of its obvious and elementary truthfulness. When he speaks of "the love-

lorn nightingale," or "the plighted clouds," we not only assent, we admire with delight, we feel æsthetic satisfaction; we say the epithets are beautiful. Why? Perhaps we can never fully explain why. But we may at least say that we admire the epithet "love-lorn" partly because of its sound, partly because of its suggestion of pleasing sentiment; and that we should admire it even if we questioned its truthfulness, even if we held that its application to the nightingale was mere illusion, mere "pathetic fallacy." And we admire the epithet "plighted," we reckon it beautiful, partly because of its beauty of sound, partly because of its suggestion of beautiful human relationship. So interpreted, it suggests, by a word of beautiful sound, the beautiful idea of the clouds as wrought with an artist's design and instinct with lovely meaning.

Beauty of epithet is hardly to be expected in prose except that which is imaginative, or prose-poetry; in all prose beauty is in phrasing rather than wording. Yet adjectives, separately noticeable for their beauty, are evidently a legitimate agency of literary effect in prose. Like other features of imaginative prose, they are open to two dangers, sentimentalism and effeminacy.

Power we have already had occasion to distinguish from beauty. We have regarded it as that literary quality, or combination of qualities, which produces strong emotion, emotion which is not necessarily pleasurable or delightful. Epithets producing such emotion are very frequent in poetry. "The *belly-pinched* wolf";¹ "he with his *horrid* crew lay vanquished";² "a gray and *gap-tooth'd* man";³

¹ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act II. Sc. 1.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I. 51-2.

³ Tennyson, *A Vision of Sin*.

“when in *swinish* sleep their *drenched* natures lie”;¹ in none of those cases can one call the epithets beautiful; they convince us by their power, by their influential place in a powerful context.

Primarily, then, epithets are agents or instruments of truth; whether by surprise or without it, whether by literality or emblem, they aim, as imagination itself aims, at expressing the truth, the innermost and essential fact, of a complex and subtly interrelated world. And secondarily — though hardly secondarily — their object is to express truth beautifully, *i.e.* with beauty of sound, and with such fitness that the facts which they express are shown as intrinsically beautiful.

Adverbs are much less common and much less important in English poetry than adjectives. A great many adverbs are trisyllabic and dactylic, and trisyllables and dactyls are comparatively rare. In dactylic or trochaic measures, adverbs of this kind may occur with excellent effect, whether as qualifying adjectives or verbs:—

“ Perfectly beautiful: let it be granted her: where is the fault?
All that I saw (for her eyes were downcast, not to be seen)
Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null.”²

Again, adverbs for the most part express abstraction and subtle refinement, while the best poetic style is predominantly concrete and simple. Given a noun, a definite object, poetry can exert its imaginative powers to find the proper epithets for it; but to go further, and expect it to characterise those epithets or even to characterise the action or suffering expressed by verbs, may be to set poetry to a task of doubtful dignity, in which failure is likely.

¹ *Macbeth*, Act I., Sc. 7.

² Tennyson, *Maud*, Pt. I. 2.

Adverbs, as instruments of abstraction and analysis, are more at home in prose than in poetry. In prose, whether of scientific exposition or narrative, so much may hang on the precise import of an adverb that the reader is forced to pause on it and mark its separate force.

The option as to nouns in poetry is large and very interesting. As students of grammar know, nouns are divided into two great classes, viz. common (man, dog), and proper (William, England); and this classification is as important for Style as for grammar.

Common Nouns.—In poetry, as in prose, the first requisite of a noun is that it should be true to the object or fact named by it, that it should be the real name of the thing or person or place. If a dog is to be mentioned in poetry, there is nothing unpoetic in calling it a dog; if a poem is about "William," then as William let him appear. But yet there is a large option, which often operates subtly; and the careful hearer or reader is quick to detect its operation.

Nouns may be chosen for their beauty or power of sound.

From a well-known poem of Herrick, we may learn the force of the beautiful noun.

" I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers,
Of April, May, of June, and July flowers;
I sing of May-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes.
I write of Youth, of Love . . .
I sing of dews, of rains, and piece by piece,
Of balm, of oil, of spice, and ambergris.
I sing of times trans-shifting; and I write
How roses first came red, and lilies white.

I write of groves, of twilights, and I sing
The Court of Mab, and of the Fairy King." ¹

Here it is difficult to distinguish, for poetic purposes, between sound and meaning; as mere parts of speech, the nouns seem to justify themselves for poetry.

Expressing, perhaps, power rather than beauty, are Milton's lines:—

" Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, power," ²

and

" Fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute." ³

Nouns may be chosen for their *simplicity*. In humorous poetry, the presence and influence of simplicity are often clear.

" Up-on the cop right of his nose he hade
A werthe, and ther-on stood a tuft of heres
Reed as the bristles of a sowes eres." ⁴

Simplicity often regulates choice of nouns when there is no question of humorously graphic realism. It is conspicuous in the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson. In Wordsworth it exemplified his theory of "poetic diction."

" They followed from the snowy bank
Those footmarks one by one,
Into the middle of the plank,
And further there were none." ⁵

In Tennyson it is one of his many manifestations of verbal fastidiousness, and of his love of oligosyllabic words. Consider, for example, the nouns in "Break, break, break!"

¹ "The Argument of his Book." See Palgrave's *Herrick's Lyrical Poems*.

² *Paradise Lost*, V. 601.

⁴ Chaucer's *Prologue to Canterbury Tales*.

³ *Ib.* II. 560.

⁵ *Lucy Gray*.

Sometimes nouns are evidently chosen for their *rarity*. The rarity may be absolute:—

“ It was the custom then to bring
The bride from home at blushing *shut* of day.” ¹

“ I did not write, nor read, nor even think,
But sat absorbed among the quickening gloom,
Most like some passive broken lump of salt
Dipped in by chance to a bowl of *ænomel*,
To spoil the drink a little and lose itself.” ²

or relative, *i.e.* the words may be rare in particular contexts only:—

“ As the dissolving warmth of dawn may fold
A half unfrozen dew-globe, green and gold,
And crystalline, till it becomes a winged mist,
And wanders up the vault of the blue day,
Outlives the noon, and on the sun’s last ray
Hangs o’er the sea, a *fleece* of fire and amethyst.” ³

Here the noun *fleece* as used of a cloud is rare though the adjective *fleecy* so used is common; absolutely, of course, it has no rarity at all.

Of absolutely rare nouns it is noticeable that their use in the best poetry is always very temperate. Their main justification seems to be archæological charm—the poet seeking his effect in the restoration to poetic currency of some word common long ago, but in modern times disused.

Proper Nouns.—We may perhaps learn more about the significance of the choice of single words in poetry from the poet’s use of personal and place names than from any other verbal choice, pure and simple. For the poet has really no reason for choosing any personal or place name except

¹ Keats, *Lamia*. ² Mrs. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Book VII.

³ Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*.

its æsthetic attractiveness: periphrases and alternatives are here unlimited. If simplicity is his aim, he can sing of "John and Sarah Green" ¹ or make such lines as these:—

"The first that died was little Jane." ²

If beauty and distinction are his objects, he can write thus:—

" 'We two,' she said, 'will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies;
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalene,
Margaret and Rosalys.' " ³

Some proper nouns, we cannot help feeling, are absolutely ugly, or, at least, unfit for poetry. Here, of course, one must be dogmatic; we cannot argue the self-evident. It is enough to remind ourselves that proper nouns such as "Ramsbotham," "Keren-happuch," "St. Neots" can hardly be used in serious poetry. They are debarred, we feel, either by ugliness of sound, which we cannot prove, or by ludicrousness or indignity of associations.

The effect of proper nouns, chosen, apparently, for beauty of sound or suggestion, is evident in poetry. Much of the charm of ballads and of poetry such as Sir Walter Scott's, which has much of the ballad-character, depends on personal and place names. In the true ballad, the charm often lies in the mere rehearsal of names made interesting by richness of association. Such is the charm of:—

"He chose the Gordons and the Graemes,
With them the Lindesays, light and gay,
But the Jardines would not with him ride,
And they rue it to this day." ⁴

¹ Wordsworth.

³ D. G. Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*.

² *Ib. We are Seven.*

⁴ Ballad of Otterburn.

In Scott the charm is more artful, and beauty of sound is more essential:—

“ He passed the Peel of Goldiland
And cross'd old Borthwick's roaring strand.”¹

Or (as Palgrave pointed out):—

“ O Brignall banks are fresh and fair
And Greta Woods are green! ”²

English poetry is full of instances of the beauty, in sound and suggestiveness, of proper names, classical, mediæval, biblical:—

“ How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?
Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigenia, whom he ravished?
And make him with fair Aegle break his faith
With Ariadne and Antiopa? ”³

Milton, influenced, perhaps, by Marlowe, is, beyond all question, the greatest master of the art of proper names in English poetry.

“ Dagon his name, sea-monster, upward man,
And downward fish; yet had his temple high
Reared in Azotus, dreaded through the coast
Of Palestine, in Gath and Ascalon,
And Accaron and Gaza's frontier bounds.
Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharpar, lucid streams.”⁴

How characteristic that passage is, every reader of Milton knows.

¹ Scott, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, I. 25.

² *Rokeby*, Song in Canto III.

³ Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II. Sc. 2, 74-81.

⁴ *Paradise Lost*, I. 462-469.

Verbs.—We need not linger long over verbs in poetry. Instances of striking effect produced simply by the choice of arresting verbs are numerous. *E.g.* :—

“ Philosopher! A fingering slave;
One that would peep and *botanise*
Upon his mother’s grave! ” ¹

Or (to repeat a familiar quotation once more):—

“ The multitudinous seas *incarnadine*. ”

Verbs, like other words in poetry, seem to be chosen on various motives, besides the obvious one, mere beauty of sound. *E.g.* beauty in sequence:—

“ A dancing shape, an image gay,
To *haunt*, to *startle*, or *waylay*. ” ²

Beauty in metaphorical suggestion:—

“ So said, his erstwhile timid lips grew bold,
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme. ” ³

Precise fitness:—

“ Thrice rang the bell, the slipper *knock’d* the ground,
And the pressed watch *returned* a silver sound. ” ⁴

Onomatopœia:—

“ All their past came *wailing* in the wind,
And all their future *thunder’d* in the sea. ” ⁵

Simplicity:—

“ I *move* the sweet forget-me-nots,
That grow for happy lovers. ” ⁶

Surprise:—

“ It *snewed* in his house of meat and drink. ” ⁷

¹ Wordsworth, *A Poet’s Epitaph*.

² Wordsworth, “ She was a phantom. ”

³ Keats, *Isabella*.

⁴ Pope, *Rape of the Lock*.

⁵ Swinburne, *Tristram of Lyonesse*.

⁶ Tennyson, *The Brook*.

⁷ Chaucer, *Prologue*.

Antique charm. This explains the constant use in poetry of the old-fashioned "eth" termination.

" It is an Ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three."

The stress of interest and importance in prose falls on sentences and those parts and aggregates of sentences known respectively as clauses and paragraphs. So far, therefore, the student of prose style has comparatively little concern with words in themselves. Yet much that is vital, not only for truth, but for that attractiveness without which truth fails to attain expression to any purpose, may turn on the æsthetically right choice of single words.

1. *Adjectives and Adverbs*.—In prose, as in poetry, the epithet is the important adjective, the adjective, *i.e.*, which the writer chooses because it expresses some essential characteristic of an object.

In scientific prose, where, in the mind of the writer, expression is little thought of as something apart from meaning, adjectives have little separate effect. The ideals of truthfulness and clearness indicate the qualities which need to be expressed, and prescribe the fitting epithets. The reader, therefore, is hardly likely to pause upon a scientific epithet (if he understands its meaning) with either surprise or admiration, unless, indeed, it should be neologistic or quasi-neologistic (*e.g.* "illative" in the phrase "the illative sense" in Newman's *Grammar of Assent*). Its merit or demerit will depend on the truthfulness and lucidity of the statement of which it forms part.

It is very different with imaginative prose. Here the prose writer has many of the poet's ideals; his effort for non-utilitarian self-relief; his effort to render the beautiful;

his efforts for sheer power; his effort to show inward, unapparent, paradoxical truth. A good deal, therefore, of what the poet can do by epithets the prose writer may do: and we may make much the same classification of his adjectival effects.

Plurality of Epithets in Prose.—In many kinds of imaginative prose, and especially in description, writers are often tempted to apply more than one epithet to an object. Generally, in such cases, it will be found that the adjectives are two or three in number; and sometimes the duplicity or triplicity recurs with a kind of rhythmical regularity. To this practice there are serious objections. For one thing, such quasi-rhythmical recurrence is too regular for the best prose, whose “rhythms” are ideally much more subtle. Again, multiplicity of epithets puts the writer in a dilemma. If each of the epithets is distinct and vital, the effort to choose them well is great, and the style in which they abound may be laborious and difficult. If, on the other hand (as constantly happens), many of them are trivial or tautological, the style becomes verbose and feeble. Such a dilemma the best prose will instinctively avoid. Adjectives will never be sprinkled carelessly or lavishly on any noun; and epithets will be chosen so as to express (if possible) not only essentiality of characteristic but unity of character.

Fashionable Epithets.—The important subject of Fashion in Style is, as a whole, postponed to a future chapter. But it is desirable to say a word on the subject here, in so far as it concerns the use of epithets.

At different periods, current prose is invaded by words which are either definable as slang or are on the borderline between slang and classical English. The existence

and influence of slang or quasi-slang epithets which we may distinguish as fashionable are very evident in contemporary prose. Those which, from our present point of view, are most important are adjectives which have acquired a slang or "cant" perversion of reference. Every reader will recognise the fashionableness of such epithets as *quaint, ghastly, weird, appalling, illuminating, convincing*, and many more, each of which is either slightly or greatly misapplied, or is used so frequently and with such universality of reference as to become tiresome, as almost any fashion does. Inasmuch as the aim of every writer ought to be to write prose which transcends fashion, he will refrain from using fashionable epithets as such. That will be his rule; but the rule will have its exceptions. In the case of such words as "illuminating" and "convincing" (metaphorical or not, as the case may be), which sin by tiresome reiteration rather than misapplication, he must use the tact, inexpressible in rules, without which any rules as to slang or the approaches to slang are valueless.

Adverbs, instruments of abstraction and analysis, are more at home in prose than in poetry. In prose, whether of scientific exposition or narrative, so much may hang on the precise import of an adverb, that the reader is forced to pause on it and mark its separate force.

Verbs in Prose.—In prose there is a great extent of option as to verbs. "The surgeon cut off the leg." Here is a sentence in which no single word has any stylistic interest at all: the simplest and most obvious words are used. "The sawbones cut off a lower limb." Here some option is used as to the nouns; here is "sawbones" instead of "surgeon" and "lower limb" instead of "leg"; and stylistic interest begins to appear. But now, let us use

option as to the verb. "The sawbones amputated (or removed) a lower limb." Here the stylistic interest is much heightened because we say "amputated" or "removed" where we might have said "cut off." And now, lastly, let us set to work with adjectives and adverbs. "The local sawbones, red-haired, rough, and self-confident, incontinently (boldly, rashly, hardily) cut off the maimed and throbbing limb." Here we at once feel that stylistic interest is at its height.

In prose, nouns are (so to say) the primary raw material; and option in their choice is at a minimum. In prose the governing principles of choice must always be clearness and accuracy; and such principles as beauty of sound and rarity must operate under much restraint if prose is to maintain its ideal vigour and virility. Yet there may be an evident option which is a faint form of the option in poetry.

(1) *Common Nouns*.—In scientific prose, accuracy must be the chief determinant. And to accuracy we must give a wide meaning, and make it include that fine and precise fitness, which only masters of style know how to secure. In the option which enables it to be secured, beauty of sound or quaint rarity may well be an object.

In imaginative prose, choice of nouns, especially of abstract nouns, is an important agency of style, only next in importance to choice of epithets. In the following passage, *e.g.*, it is difficult to say whether adjectives or nouns have the greater force:—

"I cannot find words to express the intense pleasure I have always in finding myself . . . at the foot of the old tower of Calais church. The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so

visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom; eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, yet not falling; its desert of brick-work full of bolts and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong like a bare brown rock. . . . So it stands . . . in blanched and meagre massiveness and serviceableness . . . the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling through its rents; and the grey peak of it seen far across the sea, principal of the three that rise above the waste of surfy sand and hillocked shore—the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this for patience and praise.”¹

(2) *Proper Nouns*.—As to these the option is limited, and is practically confined to fiction and prose-poetry. In fiction the option is, of course, unlimited, and is an important part of style. The choice of feigned names for characters and places made by the greater novelists is in itself often a triumph of imagination and invention.

¹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, IV. Chap. 2.

CHAPTER VII

SENTENCES

It is with the consideration of sentences that the most serious study of Style begins. Words, however carefully and deliberately chosen, are hardly more than the raw material of Style. Style is expression; expression is the audibility and visibility of thought; and thought implies sentences.

Sentences, whether in poetry or prose, are, normally, either statements or questions.¹ Before considering the main types of sentence, first in poetry then in prose, it is desirable to say a word about procedure to students of grammar and logic.

It is evident how near, in all that we say about sentences, we are to the confines both of grammar and logic. Style is expression, and expression is thought; grammar explains the mechanism of expression, and logic explains the processes of thought. Therefore Style constantly has to take note of the principles of grammar and logic; it has, now and again, to square accounts and arrange boundaries with them. Yet it has its own sphere; its own principles, divisions, and terminology. As regards logic, it has no immediate concern with the processes of thought in and for themselves; its immediate concern is with the expression

¹ Some, of course, are exclamations. But an exclamation is an implicit statement. "How wonderful is Death!" means by implication, "Death is very wonderful."

into which thought passes. As regards grammar it is in much the same position. The mechanism of expression which is the subject of grammar is conventional, and the business of grammar ends with sentences. The expression with which Style deals is founded on intrinsic fitness, and the business of Style may almost be said to begin with sentences. Correctness, according to a definite arbitrary standard, is the ideal of grammar. Style is concerned, not with correct or incorrect, but with good, better, and best in the clothing or presentment of thought, considered as evolution, or progression, or composition.

Style being thus different from logic and grammar, this book will always treat it as such, and not necessarily in all points follow the method and nomenclature of logic and grammar. Students of logic and grammar, therefore, will not be surprised if they find types of sentence, and constituents of sentences, presented in this chapter under names different from those to which they are accustomed. They will find the arrangement simpler, and the nomenclature more popular.

I. POETRY. *Length of Sentence.*—Every reader must be struck by the great rarity of short sentences in poetry. A short sentence may be defined as a sentence of one phrase, *e.g.* “the world is round”; or, at most, of two phrases, *e.g.* “Man proposes, but God disposes”; a phrase being understood as the words of a sentence followed by one of the “points,” ranging from comma to full stop, *i.e.* words grouped according to pauses necessary for intelligent reading.

Sentences of one phrase are to be found in poetry, *e.g.*:

“Time rolls his ceaseless course,”¹

¹ Scott, *Lady of the Lake*, III. 1.

or

“ I sing the sofa,” ¹

but they are exceedingly rare, and it is not difficult to understand why. They are too sententious, dogmatic, and abrupt for the characteristic expression of poetry, with its *cantabile* movement (so to call it), even when it is not formally lyrical.

The two-phrase sentence is more frequent. It is more poetic than the other, inasmuch as it necessitates a pause and re-commencement in reading or recitation.

“ Twelve months are gone and over,
And ten long tedious days.”

The pause at the comma after “over” emphasises the rhythm, and gives the sentence the *cantabile* movement characteristic of poetry. Such sentences are rare, because the rhythmical effect is so short-lived, and the *cantabile* movement is so early checked. They are suited either to a simple, almost childishly simple, kind of narrative or to sententious poetry, which, in English literature at least, is an inferior sort, though common and excellent elsewhere, *e.g.*, in the aphoristic poetry of the East.² Even in the poetry of Pope, the poetry of the heroic couplet where each couplet is most self-contained, they are not common.

In English poetry, then, sentences are generally of three or more phrases. We need not go beyond the opening sentence of *Paradise Lost*, which consists of sixteen lines and seventeen phrases, to convince ourselves that con-

¹ Cowper, *Task*, I. 1.

² “ His work is honour and majesty
And his righteousness endureth for ever.”

“ As a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.”

tinuous blank verse is patient of long sentences. And, as we read on in *Paradise Lost*, we see that the first sentence is not exceptional, that the poem is built up of long sentences. It is much the same in Thomson's *Seasons*, in Cowper's *Task*, in Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*, in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

If we take rhymed heroics as the type of continuous rhyming poetry, and examine its use in the best instances, *e.g.*, by Chaucer, Waller, Dryden, Pope, Swinburne, we shall find, in varying degree, the same result. And, as regards blank verse and rhymed heroics alike, we realise that the question is fundamentally one of prosody; that rhythm and metre, or rhythm, metre, and rhyme are the determinants of effect; and that to these length or shortness of sentence is comparatively indifferent.

In poetry written in stanzas, sentence-effect is crossed by stanza-effect; *e.g.*, in quatrains the importance for style of the sentences is almost entirely obscured by the importance of the stanzas, and we think much less about the former. On the whole, we expect each quatrain to form a sentence; but, if the sentence goes beyond the four-line bounds, and even if it includes many stanzas, we are neither surprised, perplexed, nor displeased.

Complexity of Sentence.—Stylistic complexity, as distinguished from mere length, depends chiefly on two things: (1) the presence of conditions or hypotheses; (2) the presence of parentheses. Both conditions and parentheses make a considerable demand on the intelligence of the hearer or reader; and the question presents itself: is this appeal to intelligence congenial to the best poetry?

Conditions imply *uncertainty* and *suggestion*; and those are both poetic qualities. Uncertainty is the mother of

aspiration, faith, hope—all these are as close to poetry as to religion; and suggestiveness is the very atmosphere of poetry. On the other hand an even *cantabile* movement is, as we have seen, characteristic of poetry as such; and both conditions and parentheses make such a movement difficult to sustain. To argumentative and didactic poetry conditional sentences are quite congenial:—

“ For granting we have sinned, and that the offence
Of man is made against Omnipotence,
Some price that bears proportion must be paid
And infinite with infinite be weighed.” ¹

Such poetry speaks for itself. Typical narrative or epic poetry is based on a sequence in time, and therefore admits sparingly the uncertainties and delays of hypothesis. In Milton, indeed, hypothetical sentences abound:—

“ If Thou beest he—but Oh how fallen! how changed
From him! who, in the happy realms of light,
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine
Myriads, though bright . . . if he whom mutual league,” etc.²

When we examine this characteristic sentence we reflect that it is a reported speech, and is to be ranked more properly as dramatic than epic. And the more thoroughly we ransack *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* the more convinced we shall be that it is in the speeches rather than in the narrative parts that conditional sentences abound. Indeed, it is chiefly to dramatic poetry that we must go in search of hypothetical sentence-structure. We recognise at once as the highest poetry such a sentence as this:—

“ If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequences, and catch

¹ Dryden's *Religio Laici*, III-III.

² *Paradise Lost*, I. 84.

With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time
 We'd jump the life to come." ¹

Parenthesis is a deliberate attempt to make one sentence do the work of more than one. Its effect is to suspend the principal action of the sentence and delay its issue; and, where parenthesis abounds, the expression is characterised by delay and discontinuity. Now, discontinuity gives a jerky character to verse and hinders its flow; and it is, therefore, not surprising that parenthesis, like hypothesis, is chiefly to be found in dramatic poetry. It is to be found in Milton, but nearly always in reported speech:—

" Adam

Thus said:—" Native of Heaven (for other place
 None can than Heaven such glorious shape contain)
 Vouchsafe with us
 in yonder shady bower
 To rest.'" ²

In Dryden's didactic and argumentative poetry it is fairly common.

The *refrain*, *i.e.* a short sentence—often, not necessarily, an exclamation—recurring, it may be, at regular intervals, often with but slight relevancy, if any, to the immediately neighbouring sentences, though itself hardly a parenthesis, has much of the effect of parenthesis.

" By none but me can the tale be told
 The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold
 (Lands are swayed by a King on a Throne).

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,
 Yet the tale can be told by none but me
 (The sea hath no King but God alone).'" ³

¹ *Macbeth*, Act I. Sc. 7.

² *Paradise Lost*, V. 361-368. †

³ D. G. Rossetti, *The White Ship*.

Here the discontinuity and irrelevance are more than compensated by the nature of the refrains, as asserting and repeating, in the suggestive manner characteristic of poetry, the contrast between human and divine power which underlies the lyrical narrative. In poetry other than lyrical, the refrain is unusual. We meet it in Browning combined with the shred or tag of overheard song:—

“ Flower o’ the rose
If I’ve been merry, what matter who knows? ” ¹

In Browning indeed, the most dramatic of English poets beyond the bounds of drama itself, parenthesis is almost as frequent as in the dramatists.

Interrogations and Exclamations. — The most cursory survey of poetry shows the large proportion of questions and exclamations among its sentences. Both, as used in poetry, express much the same mood: the question put to all mankind and expecting no answer, is not very different from the exclamation, whether of mere wonder or of admiration. Both express one of poetry’s characteristic attitudes.

Lyrical poetry is largely composed of interrogations and exclamations.

“ O me! What eyes hath love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight;
Or if they have, where is my judgment fled
That censures falsely what they see aright?
If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so?
If it be not, then love doth well denote
Love’s eye is not so true as all men’s; No,
How can it? O how can love’s eye be true,
That is so vex’d with watching and with tears?

¹ R. Browning, *Men and Women*: *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

No marvel then though I mistake my view;
 The sun itself sees not till heaven clears.
 O cunning Love! With tears thou keep'st me blind,
 Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find." ¹

Both exclamation and interrogation are apt to betray a certain helplessness, a certain lack of conviction and resource in the poet: as evidence of imaginative power, therefore, we must hold them inferior to statement. The inferiority is evident in the following:—

“ Blow, blow thou winter wind,
 Thou art not so unkind
 As man's ingratitude;
 Thy tooth is not so keen
 Because thou art not seen
 Although thy breath be rude.
 Heigh ho! Sing heigh ho! unto the green holly
 Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly;
 Then heigh ho the holly!
 This life is most jolly! ” ²

The two statements, beginning with the second and ending with the sixth line, are of higher imaginative value than the exclamatory refrain, notwithstanding its charm and suggestive significance. Interrogation stands perhaps on a higher plane; for it may be used not only to project hard or unanswerable questions into the void, but also to maintain argument, to instruct by calling forth intelligence (as in didactic poetry), or to carry on that dialogue with an invisible interlocutor or other self which is but another form of statement. In argumentative poetry questions are often answered at once:—

“ Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
 For this plain reason: Man is not a fly.” ³

¹ Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 148.

² Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II. Sc. 7.

³ Pope, *Essay on Man*, I. 193-4.

In the following, the poetic value of wistful interrogation is obvious:—

“ Who was her father?
 Who was her mother?
 Had she a sister?
 Had she a brother?
 Or was there a dearer one
 Still, and a nearer one
 Yet, than all other? ” ¹

Invocations and Commands. — Invocation (with which may be ranked apostrophe) is an address—generally a claim on attention or a request for a favour or visit, to a person or persons, alive or dead, present or absent, concrete or abstract, *e.g.* :—

“ Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born.” ²

“ Strong Son of God, Immortal Love.” ³

“ Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things
 To low ambition, and the pride of Kings.” ⁴

The use of the imperative mood, for invocation or command, enters vitally into poetic structure. It is the habit of the poet to transcend the limits of time and space and actuality; to treat the absent as present, the dead as alive, the non-existent as existing. In accordance with this habit, he is constantly addressing distant or dead people, places, or imaginary beings, asking or ordering them to be or do something for the sake of his poetic purposes. Especially is this so in drama and lyric. How typical are the following examples no reader of poetry needs to be reminded:—

¹ Hood, *The Bridge of Sighs*.

² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III. 1.

³ Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, Prologue.

⁴ Pope, *Essay on Man*, I. 1.

Thus "The Round Table" is non-metrical, "The Table Round" is metrical; the first order is prose, the second poetry. Also inversion tends to produce in the reader or hearer the uncertainty, anticipation, excitement, and surprise which are among the characteristic aims of poetry. The phrase "As we hurried his corpse to the ramparts" is as metrical as the line in the poem. But it is comparatively unpoetical because there is no element of anticipation or surprise in the statement. "We hurried his corpse to the ramparts" expresses merely a hasty, perhaps an indecently hasty, funeral. In "As his corpse to the ramparts we hurried," we have, within the narrow limits of a few words, first the surprising shock of "his corpse," then the climax, "to the ramparts we hurried," a climax exciting enough to carry on the attention with the eagerness which poetry as such requires.

II. PROSE.—In prose there seems more option as to the character of sentences than in poetry. In prose one can generally conceive a thought or feeling as expressed otherwise than in any particular case it is; and therefore one can paraphrase most prose sentences with more or less success—at all events, if the prose is of the typical utilitarian sort, and scientific rather than imaginative.

Length and Shortness.—In prose as in verse we first consider whether sentences are long or short.

(1) "Those concurrent circumstances much altered and suppressed that good humour and spirit the Houses were well disposed to meet with, and the angry men, who were disappointed of the preferment they expected, and had promised themselves, took all occasions by their emissaries to insinuate into the minds of the people that the rebellion

in Ireland was contrived or fomented by the King, or at least by the Queen, for the advancement of Popery, and that the rebels published and declared that they had the King's authority for all they did; which calumny, though without the least shadow or colour of truth, made more impression upon the minds of sober and moderate men (and who till then had much more disliked the passionate proceedings of the Parliament) than could be then imagined or can yet be believed, so great a prejudice, or want of reverence, was universally contracted against the Court, especially toward the Queen, whose power and activity was thought too great."¹

(2) "On a sudden all was changed. The Revolution came. The heir of Argyle returned in triumph. He was, as his predecessors had been, the head, not only of a tribe but of a party. . . . Thus was terror and agitation in the castles of twenty petty kings. The Macnaughtons were still more alarmed. Once they had been the masters of those beautiful valleys through which the Ara and the Shira flow into Loch Fyne. But the Campbells had prevailed."²

The study of these two passages is enough to remind us that the typical prose sentence, the unit of prose style, is the short sentence rather than the long one. The dominant motive of prose is utilitarian; its primary obligations are logic and lucidity; and these requirements are best met, on the whole, by a sequence of rather short sentences, which engage or inform the hearer or reader, without straining or wearying his attention. I have said "hearer or reader." We must bear in mind that in prose as well as in verse the ear is appealed to primarily, and the

¹ Clarendon, *History of the Rebellion* (Macray), Book II. s. 31.

² Macaulay, *History of England*, Chap. 13.

eye secondarily; that how a sentence sounds is for style always more important than how it looks.

There is something to be said about the appropriateness of long or short sentences to the different kinds of prose distinguished in Chapter V. *Oratory* is, on the whole, patient of long sentences. It is, in a special sense, meant for the ear—co-operating, we may add, with the eye. Voice appealing to the ear and gesture appealing to the eye may make endurable and delightful a sentence which would be unbearably long without them. We may almost say that voice and gesture supersede sentence-structure; while the word “cadence,” often loosely applied to sentences in general, has a definite meaning in connexion with the sentences of the orator, whether preacher or secular speaker. In what we have distinguished as hortatory prose it is not very different. The vocalisation and gesture which may mask or recommend length in an oration proper may be supplied by imagination to the sentences of a hortatory writer.

As to the *treatise*. Neither the religious writer nor the philosopher can get far with short sentences only. The seriousness and reverence which he ought to cultivate will lead to caution in expression; and caution may lead in two directions. If it makes the writer's movement hesitating, it will tend to make his sentences long; if it only makes it scrupulous, he may avoid long sentences as abounding in pitfalls. Clearness is, on the whole, best secured by short sentences. When he is suggestive, the religious or philosophic writer may trench on the domain of the poet; and the nearer prose draws to poetry the more tolerant of long sentences does it become.

The bulk of philosophic prose in English may equally be

called scientific; and the scientific treatise has a denotation too wide to make it easy to find any uniform rule as to length of sentence. Much scientific writing consists of exposition to which complex sentences with subordinate clauses are essential. On the other hand, the need of clearness, and the constant danger of hindering exposition by causing mental fatigue to the writer, impose an ever-recurring obligation to write in as short sentences as possible.

We have realised the complexity of the *historian's* task, and the variety of expressional obligations which bind him. Such being the case, it is a small question whether the historian in general chooses, or ought to choose, long or short sentences. There are almost as many kinds of historian as there are aspects of history. If we make a brief regressive survey of the most famous English historians, we find how short, as a rule, are the sentences of Macaulay and Froude, both being writers mainly of narrative. Gibbon's is essentially, though not superficially, a short sentence style. Gibbon never uses the one-clause sentences of which Macaulay and Froude are so fond; and his style never has the hurrying movement of theirs, the hurrying movement which comes from the effort to make sentences as short as possible. Yet they are sentences which depend for effect on balance; and balance being essentially dualistic the fewer the clauses the better.¹

Hume is what is called a "master of style": in more precise language, he is eminently and habitually logical

¹ Here is a typical Gibbon sentence: "Every mode of religion, to make a deep and lasting impression, on the human mind, must exercise our obedience by enjoining practices of devotion for which we can assign no reason; and must acquire our esteem, by inculcating moral duties analogous to the dictates of our own hearts." *Decline and Fall*, Chap. 8. The balance must be felt by every reader, and its limitation of the number of clauses.

and lucid, and his expression is natural (as distinguished from such artificiality as Gibbon's) and relatively simple. In his *History of England* he primarily cultivated narrative, interspersed with criticism of policy. Such an aim tends to produce sentences which are neither conspicuously long nor conspicuously short.

On the whole, our conclusion must be that the ideal historian ought not to restrict himself to long or short, simple or complex, sentences, but to use either or both according to the aspect of his work. Short and simple sentences, let us say, in narrative and a good deal of description; longer and more complex ones for psychological analysis, intricate description or sustained argument—the historian, who needs so much for his outfit, certainly needs this two-edged weapon.

As to the *essay*, much depends on its character. In a class by itself stands the brief sententious essay of Bacon. Its sententiousness precludes length of sentence, and ensures balance. The biographical or critical essay has the option as to length of sentence of the treatise or history. The essay *par excellence*, the essay on the model of Montaigne, the essay of Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Dr. John Brown—gives the widest option. It soon becomes plain to the student that this kind of essay is patient of long, often complex, sentences with abundance of hypothesis and parenthesis. And it is so, he realises, much because poetry is so, because it revels in the concrete, in detail; because it reveals egoism, idiosyncrasy, often caprice and oddity; because its immediate ideals are neither lucidity nor progress, but self-relief and the quest for sympathy.

The range of sentence-length in *fiction* is as large, or nearly as large as in history.

As to the length of the *journalistic* sentence there is not much to be said. On the whole, being rapidly written, and meant to be rapidly read, journalistic sentences will tend to be short.

When we consider long sentences closely, we realise that we must try to arrive at the *rationale* of the phrases (whether clauses, *i.e.* phrases containing a verb, or not) which compose them.

The first thing to be noticed about clauses is that it seems to lie in the writer's option whether they are to be clauses or sentences. In text-books of grammar and rhetoric we are told that some sentences are "periods," and some are "loose sentences," a period being—as, *e.g.*, Bain puts it—a sentence of which "the meaning is suspended until the close"; or, as Whateley puts it more fully, a sentence "which is so framed that the grammatical construction will not admit of a close before the end of it," *i.e.* before the full stop. A loose sentence is one which may, without any injury to fulness of meaning, and with slight changes in wording and pointing, be broken up into component sentences; and, without injury to partial meaning, may be ended before the final full stop. In other words, clauses may be made sentences at will.

When sentences are not very long, it is not of much moment for style whether they are periods or loose sentences. Both are often used in the same paragraph. "What I feared most, but perhaps only through ignorance of zoology, was, lest, whilst my sleeping face was upturned to the stars, some one of the many little Brahminical-looking cows on the Cambrian hills one or other, might poach her foot into the centre of my face. I do not suppose any fixed hostility of that nature to English faces in Welsh

cows; but everywhere I observe in the feminine mind something of beautiful caprice, a floral exuberance of that charming wilfulness which characterises our dear human sisters, I fear, through all worlds.”¹ Technically, the first of these sentences is a period, the second a loose sentence; yet in reading or hearing, we hardly notice the difference. But, in sentences of great length, the difference of structure is an important element in the effect. In some long sentences, those, especially, which aim at beauty or power by means of suspension of the readers’ interest, and those of a rhythmical and quasi-lyrical character, the periodic structure is vital: to break them up—even were it grammatically possible to do so—would be to destroy them. In others the length is a matter of punctuation rather than thought, and is dependent, to a large extent, upon fashion. The loose sentence is the typical sentence of plain prose, aiming at logic and lucidity; and whether several sentences, or several clauses within one sentence, are the more helpful towards those aims, is a matter of opinion.

Every sentence which is an aggregate of several phrases has one marked external characteristic, viz., the presence of points. Like so much else in Style, punctuation is to a large extent optional; and to a large extent, therefore, it has suffered the fate of the rest of Style—of being dismissed as not much more than an accident of individuality. Let us try to find out now how much more it may be. Putting on one side full stops, which mark the close of sentences and about which there is nothing to be said, we regard points as marking the end of phrases. Primarily, punctuation is for the ear rather than the eye. To a practised eye,

¹ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 133 (ed. 1862).

a long sentence, either unpunctuated or erroneously punctuated, quickly yields its meaning; but the same sentence read aloud may be unintelligible to the hearer. Points express graduated pauses in vocalisation; but, inasmuch as vocalisation is the expression of thought, they also express stages or articulations of thought.

We may classify phrases in terms of punctuation as:—

1. Comma-phrases.
2. Semi-colon phrases.
3. Colon phrases.
4. Parentheses (whether marked by brackets or dashes).

1. According to the *New English Dictionary*, the comma, as originally thought of by the Greeks in their Rhetoric and Prosody, was “a phrase or group of words.” In modern use, the Dictionary goes on to tell us, a comma is “a punctuation-mark used to separate the smallest members of a sentence.” From our point of view, the mere mark is of no importance; we are really interested only in what interested the Greeks, viz., the phrase or group of words to which the mark is attached, and its significance in style. And this applies to semi-colons, colons, and parentheses, as much as to commas. It is phrases with which we are concerned.

What is the essential permanent significance of the comma-phrase? It would seem to be threefold: to express (1) apposition; (2) rapid sequence; (3) subordination.

(1) Grammatically considered, apposition is the addition of one substantive, or substantival phrase, to another by way of attribution or complement. In other words, it serves towards the enrichment or building up of notions. By such apposition as is normally indicated by commas, a notion is enriched or amplified or completed in a simple

and obvious way. We cannot get a more vivid impression of this function of the comma than by considering the following prose sentence from *Hamlet*. (I put the appositional phrases in italics):—

“I have of late (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that *this goodly frame, the earth*, seems to me a sterile promontory; *this most excellent canopy, the air*, look you, *this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire*, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”¹ Here it is evident how the appositional comma-phrases combine with the epithets to enrich the notion or vision of the sky. And the effect may be as evident in the plainest prose as in prose which may be called rhetorical or prose-poetic. “From these sentiments arose the Revolution, an event of mighty consequence, and the firmest foundation of British liberty.”² In this sentence the appositional phrases almost amount to a definition of the Revolution.

(2) One of the most important functions of the comma is to mark the succession or sequence of notions, with the utmost rapidity consistent with intelligent listening. The simplest type of such phrases is the bare enumeration John, James, William, Thomas, which is not interesting enough for Style. But the stylistic importance of the phrase is evident from other examples. “For magnificence, for pathos, for vehement exhortation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator, and the divine, *this homely dialect, the dialect of plain working men*, was

¹ *Hamlet*, Act II. Sc. 2.

² Hume, *Essay on the Parties of Great Britain*.

perfectly sufficient.”¹ The clauses not italicised are an excellent example of the rapid sequence of ideas, while the clauses in italics are purely appositional.² In sequence, rapidity is the essential matter, a rapidity, it must not be forgotten, for the ear rather than the eye.

(3) The student of grammar is well aware of the importance of *subordination* in sentence-structure. From the point of view of Style subordinate phrases or clauses marked off by commas are used chiefly to help in explanation and to express exceptions. “John, *whose father was a blacksmith*, went to school”; here is the comma-clause of explanation. “The cathedral church is of the Perpendicular age, *so far at least as three-fourths of it are concerned*, and it is a noble building.” Here is the comma-clause of exception.

The typical forms of the explanatory comma-phrase are the clauses classed in grammar as *adjectival* or *adverbial*; and, in order to deserve or require commas, they and the phrases explained by them must be long enough to put some strain on voice or ear. In “I saw the man who did the deed” there is no strain, and, therefore, no punctuation. But in “I saw a great host advancing, *whose banners streamed on the wind*,” the sweeping length of the sentence calls for a comma before the adjectival clause.

2. The semi-colon has more interest for Style than the comma; and the consideration of it takes us deeper into the heart of prose expression. The semi-colon marks a

¹ Macaulay's Essay on Bunyan.

² It is worth remarking that for Style—whatever grammar may have to say—the presence of the conjunction *and* in no way deprives clauses of their appositional or sequential character. “John and James and William,” here the conjunctions serve as commas. And the same is true of “John, my brother and friend,” where one might just as well write, “John, my brother, my friend.”

longer pause than the comma. The *rationale* of the phrase comes out most clearly when we consider it in relation to the complete short sentence closed by a full stop. Most semi-colon phrases may be made into complete sentences, if we so wish; and whether they are made so or not will depend on the taste of the writer, and on his conception of the proper progress of the expression of thought. It is obvious that semi-colon phrases add to the complexity of style; and avoidance of complexity may be one of the writer's stylistic ideals. On the other hand, complexity may be truer to thought. "He doth not think the Church of England so narrowly calculated, that it cannot fall in with any regular species of government; nor does he think any one regular species of government more acceptable to God than another."¹ Here two statements are made each of which is important enough to form a sentence by itself; and both of which are so closely allied in the expression of the writer's thought that they may be combined, as Swift has combined them, in the complex unity of a semi-colon sentence. To turn the alliance into a mere sequence—which would happen if each statement were given a sentence to itself—would be to cultivate simplicity and brevity at the expense of fidelity to the writer's thought. For Swift is expressing in this sentence not two thoughts but one—the adaptability of the Church of England to any political constitution; and to the building up of that thought each clause makes an important contribution. The Church of England is not so narrowly calculated that it cannot fall in with any regular species of government: that is the bare dogmatic statement in the first clause. But we want to know the reason before we can appraise the doctrine, and

¹ Swift, *Sentiments of a Church of England Man*, Sec. II.

we get at it in the second clause; no regular species of government is more acceptable to God (and *à fortiori* is more adapted to the Church of England) than another.

The expression of plurality in unity, then, and in unity less obvious than that which obtains in comma-structure, is the deepest *rationale* of the semi-colon clause. There is another which deserves our notice.

The semi-colon expresses sequence and antithesis where the conjunctions "and" and "but" are respectively used, and where the movement is too slow for commas. "I will go to London to-morrow; and, when I have seen the sights there, I will go to Paris." Many writers, and especially many writers of the present day, would put a comma after to-morrow; but, in so doing, they would hurry the movement beyond what the situation calls for. "My time in London was pleasant; but, when I reached Paris, everything seemed to go wrong." Here the force of the antithesis is adequately represented by the semi-colon, and would be inadequately expressed by a comma.

In these matters the ear is the ultimate authority, and, even in silent reading, the eye acts as the representative of the ear and in unconscious deference to it. The semi-colon pause is used instead of the full stop in order that the ear may have a certain kind of satisfaction. The effect of prose made up of very short sentences, sentences where the full stop comes where the semi-colon might come, is often jerky; and the ear is deprived of the pleasure which comes from pauses of different lengths, the satisfaction of realising the various capacities of the sentence.

3. The *rationale* of the colon is less simple than that of the semi-colon. Considered aurally, it marks a longer pause than the semi-colon. Considered with reference to the logic

of the sentence, its main function is to express co-ordination of clauses in the "compound" or loose sentence of grammar; co-ordination being marked by the absence of the so-called "copulative" and "disjunctive" conjunctions "and" and "but." "I am going to London to-morrow: while there, I will see the principal sights." "He voted in favour of the measure: his brother gave his vote on the other side"; such is the typical colon-structure. Its justification, like that of the semi-colon, is the expression of plurality in unity; the maintenance, as far as possible, of the alliance of thoughts within the compass of one sentence. Its essential difference from the semi-colon (strikingly marked by the absence of conjunctions) is the difference between juxtaposition in space and continuity in time. The clauses separated by the colon are in a near balanced proximity to each other; they are contiguous rather than continuous. A style in which colon-phrases prevail (and it is prevalence, not occasional occurrence, that makes punctuation stylistically important) is necessarily a hard and jerky rather than a flowing and undulating style. It is a style in which the statements are, as it were, jerked out and dumped down, singly or in pairs, rather than linked into a chain or woven into a fabric; and that is, of course, an inferior style. Yet there are many moments, especially in prose, when the characteristic continuity of the comma- and semi-colon structure needs to be broken; when slightly longer pauses have to be made; when mere co-ordination has to be emphasised, or antithesis shown in its keenest sharpness. For such moments the colon cannot be dispensed with.

4. Parentheses are marked, sometimes by two dashes, sometimes by brackets. Both in verse and prose paren-

thesis is (I repeat my words) "a deliberate attempt to make one sentence do the work of more than one." It may be used for explanation wherever lucidity demands it, and wherever the appositional or explanatory comma-clause does not suffice for the purpose. "John Jones, the brother of your friend, lives there"; here comma-clauses suffice. But let us examine the following sentence. "Strong beer, a liquor extracted with very little art from wheat or barley, and *corrupted* (as it is strongly expressed by Tacitus) into a certain semblance of wine, was sufficient for the gross purposes of German debauchery."¹ Here a very definite statement is made about a subject called "strong beer." That the statement may be intelligible and effective, the nature of "strong beer" must be explained. The writer makes his explanation in two stages: the beer was (1) artless (and so suited to the *gross* purposes of German debauchery); (2) artful (corrupted into a semblance of wine, and so furnished with the necessary minimum of attractiveness). Now, if the word "corrupted" had been quite clear, there would have been no need for a bracketed parenthesis in the sentence. But it is not clear; its use, where it stands, is unusual and startling; and more explanation is wanted if the sentence is to be lucid. The explanation is accordingly given in the parenthesis: "corrupted" is the translation of a significant Latin word used by Tacitus. Had this part of the explanation been put between commas, the sentence would have been delayed and weakened where it was meant to be strong. "Corrupted into a certain semblance of wine"; we want the whole force of that expression; and we get it by the use of the brackets which enclose the necessary explana-

¹ Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Chap. 9.

tion, as it were, in a band, and thus keep it from confusing, and so weakening, the sentence. The effect is partly for the eye, chiefly for the ear. If the sentence were read aloud, the voice would be slightly lowered in pitch and the reading much hurried at the words within brackets.

The parenthesis may be used for exclamatory, interrogative, or deprecatory phrases. "The ship struck, and (Heaven help us!) began almost at once to heel over." "The figure (was it a living man or a ghost?) rose up and stole away." "I then said (if I may be allowed to quote myself) that the situation was exceedingly strained."

So far as the explanatory use of parenthesis is concerned, it has to be remembered that the normal object of prose is to explain subject-matter; and that, normally, adequate explanations may be given without parentheses. Prose ought to have an even, unobstructed onward movement; and where a reasonable number of clauses fails to explain any matter, another sentence, or more than one, should be written. The parenthesis is wanted only where its modicum of explanation is too instantly desirable to be postponed to another sentence, and would have a delaying and confusing effect if it were not confined in the wholesome restraint of the pair of brackets or dashes. The parenthesis is, therefore, an exceptional, not a normal, form of explanatory clause.

Still more exceptional, obviously, is the deprecatory (or, as we may also call it, the egotistical) parenthesis. It is the product of a self-consciousness which is the last quality a good writer would wish to exhibit. In written prose it is hardly ever necessary, except as a piece of conventional literary good manners. In public speech it is more difficult to avoid and more allowable. "My opinion is (and I give

it the more readily that some of my opponents have, I believe, done me the honour of wishing to know it), my opinion is, etc.”; everybody recognises this style. Sometimes the egotistical parenthesis is taken so seriously that it is allowed to dominate the rest of the sentence. “My hon. friends below me [and I am quite sure that not one of them will suppose that I speak from the mere wish to oppose them in any way; they are personal friends of mine, and it pains me now to differ from them, but] hon. members seem to think, when they are looking a long way off for the objects to be gained by war, that a man who looks at home is not a friend to his country.”¹ Here, by the aposiopesis after the giving out of the subject of the sentence; the length of the passage between brackets with its two semi-colons; the use of “and” and “but” where they could not be used in written prose; and the alteration of the subject on re-statement (from “my hon. friends below me” to “hon. members”) the parenthesis is given a regulative position in the sentence; a kind of position possible only in speech.

The use of the parenthesis in prose, it is evident, needs much restraint and tact if it is not to spoil the ideal continuity of prose style.

There is at least one important quality of prose with reference to which we may estimate the effect, not only of parenthesis, but of all phrases, and that is rhythm. But, though rhythm is an important quality of prose, it is not easy to define it when it is present. What does rhythm mean? It means regularity of arrangement; architecture

¹ John Bright: Speech in the House of Commons on Russia, June 7, 1855. I have supplied the square brackets; only a single dash is used in the report of the speech, which I take from the edition of Thorold Rogers. (Macmillan, 1869.)

is the rhythm of building; dancing and marching are rhythms of bodily movement. In verse, rhythm is practically identical with metre. In prose, rhythm is a quasi-irregularity, an *irregular* regularity (so to call it) which appeals to the ear, but which it is very difficult to express in rules, and on which, therefore, it is impossible to count. It has to be indicated, rather than measured, by variations in strength of tone and pauses in reading aloud. In a prose of very short sentences there is little rhythm, at any rate within the sentence. The pauses come with the full stops. But in a succession of sentences with several clauses, rhythm is often, if not generally, discernible.

We may lay it down that whatever disturbs or confuses the rhythm of a sentence is to that extent injurious; and that parentheses, accordingly (which are apt to disturb and confuse rhythm), are on the whole to be avoided. Parenthesis, except such as is merely and briefly interjectional, ought not to be used unless it is essential for clearness. Where it is really so essential, its disturbing effect on rhythm may not be felt; where it is wantonly used it may be fatal to rhythm, and so to a high dignity and beauty of prose style.

One of the most important options open to the sentence-maker is whether he shall make his statements literally or metaphorically. Figures of speech of many kinds are of the utmost importance in poetic expression; and with these, as agencies of imagination, we do not deal in this book. But the use of metaphor in prose cannot be passed over.

Its importance is proved by its abundance. The most superficial study shows that in almost every kind of prose composition metaphorical phraseology and statement are as common as literal phraseology and statement.

At first sight this is somewhat startling. The distinguishing quality of metaphor is its primary falsehood, its sacrifice of superficial to deep and essential truth. It seems, therefore, and especially its prevalence seems, to conflict with the most general canon of prose, viz., to say exactly what one means in the simplest possible words. And I think we are quite safe in concluding that the two facts cannot clearly be reconciled, or (to put it otherwise) that great prevalence of metaphor is not characteristic of the greatest prose.

But this rule has two modifications.

1. In the first place, we must remind ourselves again, as we have so often done before, that prose has many varieties; that there is imaginative as well as scientific prose. In imaginative prose metaphor may be as suitable and helpful as it is in poetry. The object of the general canon stated above is not to declare either ornament or artifice inconsistent with first-rate prose, still less to deny to prose that imaginative insight and imaginative suggestion which are so much helped by metaphor. No error in criticism is commoner or more serious than the narrowing of the scope of prose or the exaggeration of the difference between prose and poetry. Not only do prose and poetry approach indefinitely, but prose has such immense scope, variety, and applicability, that our general canon, important as it is, is very far from all sufficient. In almost every one of its many kinds, in philosophy, science, history, fiction, prose may be helped by, and may be justified in, laying aside its plainness and directness, and taking the help of the artifice which we call metaphor.

2. A very large number of single words, such as *endorse*, *espouse*, *succumb*, involve metaphor in the last resort;

and it is not necessary, in every such case, to pay respect to the metaphor involved, and to approve or disapprove the word according to the precise applicability of the metaphor. The same is true of phrases such as *running the gauntlet*, *subscribing to an opinion*. In such phrases, as in the words, the metaphorical meaning is ultimate, not immediate: the phrases are immediately literal, and no law of parcimony in metaphor ought to exclude them.

Yet we must never forget that there is such a law of parcimony, however vague it may be; and we will now consider it.

1. The obligation to directness and simplicity depends on the great importance in prose of meaning, pure and simple. Prose is primarily, and for the most part, utilitarian: *i.e.*, it is written in order to do a service to the reader; and the essential part of that service is the conveyance of meaning. If with the ordinary motives we sit down to write philosophy or science or history or fiction, we shall, if we have the instincts which characterise first-rate writers, make what we feel to be a sole and exclusive effort to be clearly and immediately understood. Other efforts of which we may afterwards become conscious, efforts after beauty, distinction, or, it may be, wit and paradox, we feel as subordinate. And both the clearness and immediacy which are part of our primary aim impel us to be explicit rather than suggestive. Therefore we write as directly as possible, as literally as possible; and our instincts lead us to dispense, for the most part, with figures such as metaphors, which are the opposite of literal, which are essentially indirect, and which express the suggestive rather than the explicit.

2. Many words and phrases which are ultimately

metaphorical are, as we said, immediately and practically literal. This fact prompts to a use of metaphor even in cases where the metaphorical meaning is immediate, and where, therefore, the precise applicability of the metaphor is matter of conscience. It is easy for a writer to be wanting in the tact which distinguishes the cases; to pass without reflection from the use of metaphors which have practically ceased to be metaphors to the use of those which are charged with metaphorical significance; and so to write a more figurative style than is consistent with the ideal of prose "of the centre." Therefore all writers should be chary of metaphor and inclined to suspect it; they should ascertain, as to every metaphor which occurs to them, whether it involves the indirectness, the *double entendre*, of true metaphor or not; otherwise they will load their composition, almost at unawares, with meaningless and meretricious ornament, and so spoil and degrade prose.

3. Metaphor is apt to make style evasive. It is this evasive tendency of metaphor that explains the paradox that it is much easier to write metaphorically than literally, *i.e.*, indirectly than directly. The literal and direct writer must know exactly what he means, and much writing is without that knowledge on the part of the writer. When one does not know exactly what one means, or where one assumes an air of certainty without any valid warrant for it, it is convenient to conceal one's deficiency by metaphors, and so avoid close quarters with one's ideas. Thus it is much easier to say that the reading of Hume roused Kant from his dogmatic slumber than to say exactly what the expression means. This is another reason for the careful cross-examination of metaphors. Without such cross-examination made for the purpose of avoiding evasion,

neither mental conception nor verbal expression is, in normal and typical prose, at its clearest and best.

4. There is great danger, in the indulgence of the metaphorical habit, not only of using metaphor for the adornment of confused thought or the concealment of inadequate knowledge, nor only of using inapplicable metaphors, but also of confusing (or, as it is called, "mixing") metaphors. This is only a gross form of the abuse of Rule 2, combined with the abuse of Rule 3. At its grossest it is an error impossible to good writers; yet the best writers may stumble into it. Thus we find in Macaulay:—

"They had been taught . . . that the antipathy of the nation to their religion was . . . a *profound* sentiment, the *growth* of five generations, *diffused* through all ranks and parties, and *intertwined* not less closely with the principles of the Tory than with the principles of the Whig."

Here I have italicised the four metaphorical words; and it is evident that they are inconsistent with one another, and that together they form a blurred image. A *profound* sentiment; that is the idea of depth—depth, whether in earth or water, much deeper than the depth of any roots. The *growth* of many generations; but one does not speak of the roots of any growth as being "profound." *Diffused* through all ranks and parties; but only liquids and vapours are diffusible; and we are speaking of something profound, which has grown for generations, *i.e.*, presumably a deep-rooted tree or other plant. Finally, "intertwined," what is this? It is, of course, appropriate to the plant-figure, if we think of the plant as ivy, or some other parasite; but we seemed to have left that, and to be speaking of a liquid or vapour!

This instance is the more remarkable that Macaulay is

not only one of the most correct of writers but one of the least addicted to metaphors. It might be pleaded for him that the metaphorical words are of those we have considered which have lost their metaphorical sense; and that, no doubt, was what justified them to himself. But while the plea may avail for each word taken singly, it hardly avails for the whole passage. The passage as a whole, by virtue of the four words I have put in italics, undoubtedly presents a metaphorical image designed to expound the subject of the sentence, viz., "the antipathy of the nation to their (the Roman Catholic) religion"; and the image, we must recognise, is blurred and confused to an almost gross extent. Nor can it be pleaded that there is a rapid succession, not an entanglement of metaphors. For the word "profound" is really inconsistent with the plant-figure expressed by "growth"; and the writer does not take leave of the figure when he introduces the metaphor of liquid or vapour; he returns to it in the word "intertwined."

In considering the use of metaphors in prose as a whole, we ought to consider its use in the different kinds of prose.

1. In reported or literary *speeches* and in *hortatory prose*, the temptation to use figures of speech of all kinds is very strong, and it is difficult to fix any quantitative limits of fitness. All speech or writing which aims at immediately influencing conduct through emotional intelligence is likely to use every possible method of appeal, and the appeal of simile in all its forms, and of much metaphor, is very powerful. Moreover, in oratory and hortatory prose, decorative beauty or power of diction is fitting; and figures of speech are a principal means of decoration. So

far, the use of metaphor is as justifiable as the kinds of prose of which it forms part.

On the other hand, the danger of using metaphor is great here, though, possibly, not so great as elsewhere. We cannot speak exhaustively about figures of speech without trenching on Rhetoric. But we may say now that the orator and hortatory writer are especially apt, in their desire to produce immediate effect, to be unscrupulous as to means, and to use vulgar or misleading metaphors. And, if prose of this kind is to any extent extemporaneous, it is extremely likely that metaphor will be used to evade, rather than to elucidate, exact thought.

2. *The Treatise* (a) *religious* ; (b) *philosophic* ; (c) *scientific*.—There is a good deal to be said about the use of simile and metaphor in this large threefold division of prose.

(a) The writer about religion or philosophy who is concerned with the ultimate nature of things may quite legitimately use both simile and metaphor. Simile, as we have seen, has tended to decline in use in all kinds of prose during the last two or three centuries; but, at least as illustration, it is immortal. The subject-matter of the religious writer and the philosopher is often abstruse and hard to expound; and both well-considered illustrations and metaphors may greatly help in elucidation and exposition. On the other hand, the danger of misusing metaphor is in philosophy and theology very great. Metaphysical facts and ideas (and much philosophy and all theology are concerned with metaphysical facts and ideas) are so hard to grasp and to state, so evasive in themselves, that they prompt to evasive treatment; and metaphor, as we know, may be an instrument of evasion. In many cases, also, and especially, perhaps, in theology, they prompt to a

decorative or ornate style, which is not really fitting. Therefore the philosopher and the theologian are especially bound to exercise self-restraint and tact in the use of all indirect or decorative expression, and to make sure that the figures they use really elucidate without evading the matters with which they are concerned.

(c) *The scientific writer*, whether on science proper, on philosophy or theology, must be specially careful in the use of metaphor, and, indeed, would do well to avoid it almost entirely. Simile in the form of illustration may be of the greatest value in science, provided the writer has thorough knowledge of his subject so that the illustrations may be exactly applicable. But, as his propositions for the most part concern matters of fact (as they are called), and as his method is for the most part expository, it ought to be the scientist's ideal to express them in direct language.

3. *The historian* is dubiously situated with regard to figures of speech, because, as a writer, he has so many ideals. He is partly a scientific, partly a "literary" writer; his basis is narrative; but he may at times, and at times he ought to, play the part of the philosopher; his object is truth, and yet he has so to imagine and reproduce the past as to be of the same family as the writer of fiction, with his privileges of invention and make-believe.

As to metaphor, a rule for his guidance seems to emerge. When he is scientific, he ought to eschew metaphor like other scientific writers; when his writing is "literary," when he writes as a philosopher or a prose-poet, or when he uses his imagination almost like a novelist, he may use it more freely. His most dubious position is when he is writing historical or biographical narrative. For here he is beset by the common snares of all prose writers—the

temptation to use metaphor habitually in obedience to (1) a conventional habit based on the frequent disappearance of metaphorical in literal significance; (2) the tendency to evade precision of thought and that directness of expression which best conveys it. The fact that many good narrative writers use metaphor constantly must not blind us to the superiority of the non-metaphorical in this kind of prose.

4. *The novelist*, in so far as his work is non-dramatic, is much as the historian or the biographer. Like the historian and the biographer, he uses narrative; and for the writer of narrative as such the use of simile needs much restraint, and metaphor is almost a bad habit. Again, like the historian and the biographer, the novelist uses psychological analysis and ethical criticism of character; and here again we want directness of expression; simile and metaphor need to be most guardedly used.

The novelist has, however, more latitude in some directions than the historian. The mere fact, indeed, that his events and characters are "invented" does not exempt him from the historian's obligations, or put him in a wholly distinct class. For, as to events and characters, the novelist must not be fantastic; he must be true to life; he must attain verisimilitude. But there is much more within the novelist's power than fictitious narrative and character-drawing. He, much more legitimately than the historian, may play both the prose-poet and the essayist; and so flexible are their expressional limits that an opportunity is given for an extensive use of figures.

5. *The Essayist*.—So wide is the expressional range of the essay as in this book we regard it that it is difficult to frame any general rule as to temperance and intemperance

in the use of figures. Each essay, each essayist, must stand to a great extent on its or his individuality, and be judged according to canons of relative fitness. As to metaphor, we are justified in saying that the necessity of extreme temperance in the use of it is rigid for all kinds of prose, and therefore that even in the most legitimately wayward of essays or essay-like compositions the conventional over-use of metaphor should be carefully avoided. When it is used even in essays, it should be with the full consciousness and deliberate volition of the writer, and for the sole purposes of beauty or expressiveness subject to the general rules of fitness.

6. *The journalist's* range is very wide, and his art is still undeveloped, and hardly yet regularised. But one thing it is possible to say about it, and for our present purpose it is enough. A journalist's chief business is to comment on current events, and to comment so as to produce an instantaneous literary effect; and therefore he, almost more than any other writer, needs the gifts of logic and lucidity. For him, therefore, it is peculiarly necessary to cultivate directness and literality and to avoid metaphor. If his style can be described as figurative, if it abounds in metaphor recognisable as such, he must either be, it would seem, an inferior craftsman, or attempt an essayistic or prose-poetic style such as no one, writing with a journalist's swiftness and currency, ought to attempt.

CHAPTER VIII

PARAGRAPHS, SECTIONS, CHAPTERS, PARTS

IN the study of style sentences soon carry us beyond themselves. In the hearing or reading of a composition, whether in prose or verse, the sequence of sentences is very rapid; and, except for purposes of minute scrutiny or analysis, we seldom pause long over a sentence. We are carried along from sentence to sentence, and pauses worthy of the name occur at the end of larger divisions.

The movement of which we are conscious in following a composition with either eye or ear is progress. But there are more kinds of progress than one. Progress in poetry is a rather different thing from progress in prose. The progress of the scientific writer is generally different from that of the historian, and always different from that of the essayist. A rambling digressive style, in which progress is so slow as to be hardly perceptible, may be attractive or praiseworthy in an essay. In many essays or essay-like compositions (of which Montaigne's work is the prototype) illustration plays so important a part that there seems nothing describable as progress, but a mere offering of illustration after illustration, anecdote on anecdote, at the shrine of a single and (so to say) stationary theme. The humorist, whether essayist or novelist, has a kind of permanent dispensation from the duty of getting on. No

critic would find fault with the style of the following, which occurs at the beginning of a chapter:—

“I have dropped the curtain over this scene for a minute,—to remind you of one thing,—and inform you of another.

“What I have to inform you comes, I own, a little out of its due course; for it should have been told a hundred and fifty pages ago, but that I foresaw that ’twould come in pat hereafter, and be of more advantage here than elsewhere. . . . Writers had need look before them, to keep up the spirit and connection of what they have in hand. When these two things are done,—the curtain shall be drawn up again, and my uncle Toby, my father, and Dr. Slop, shall go on with their discourse, without any more interruption.”¹ The whole of *Tristram Shandy* is written in this style, and there is in it hardly any narrative progression or development of plot. In general terms, however, it may be laid down that digression, except under the direct influence of humour, and the management of a writer of true genius, is a literary vice. In the most loosely-knit essay the reader rightly expects a theme with a recognisable evolutionary progress in spite of casual whirls and eddies.

We must not think of progress as a mere sequence of sentences. For one thing (though this is a superficial consideration), a mere sequence of sentences, however clear and progressive, tires the reader, and he wants a composition to proceed by stages with halting-places. Hence, partly, the stanzas of poetry, and the paragraphs, chapters, “books,” or what not, of modern prose and verse.

It soon becomes evident that divisions are not wholly conventional, or merely for the momentary relief of ocular,

¹ Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Book II. Chap. 19.

aural, or mental tension. Take such a sequence of sentences as the following:—

“ The battle, after raging fiercely from dawn to sundown, ended in the total and final rout of the enemy, who immediately supplicated for conditions of peace. So the war reached its term. The chief event of the following year was a great flood, which did incalculable damage.” No one could say that a new paragraph after “ term ” would be artificial. The sentences are typical historical narrative; and it is perfectly natural to mark, by a new paragraph, the transition from the subject of a war to the very different subject of a flood. Not so to mark it would be to obscure a natural change, a change of theme.

The principles of division in poetry we will consider presently. As regards prose, we may note here that the paragraph is the least artificial of the larger sections or divisions. As to the others, the motive of mental relief may be predominant. Where, as in the work of the essayist or journalist, the composition is short, paragraphs will suffice, and there will probably be no need for chapters, still less for larger divisions. But when the work is either long or complex or both; when it is narrative or descriptive, expository or argumentative; chapters and larger sections may be so helpful and indeed essential to lucidity, that we recognise them as natural rather than artificial.

I. POETRY.—In poetry, more prominently than in prose, the question of unity (with which we shall be concerned in the next chapter) asserts its presence. On the whole, a poet is more likely than a prose writer to conceive his theme in its totality before he begins to write (or, as we may say, sing about it, or, rather, sing *it*); and, when he does begin to sing it, the whole mechanism of the expres-

sion, including the divisions, may seem to determine itself without much, if any, forethought or design.

Again, in poetry, the organisation of metre and rhythm cannot always be quite easily kept apart from the mere divisions of a poem. Yet they can, to some extent, be kept apart; and we must try so to keep them in this chapter.

Remembering these things, let us take the chief classes of poetry one by one.

1. *Narrative Poetry*.—Narrative poetry (including epic) is the likeliest prose in what we may call its externals. What regulates division in prose may, therefore, to some extent be expected to regulate it in this kind of poetry.

Narrative poetry tells a story, either in *continuous* or in *broken* verse. Of the former we may take Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Paradise Lost* as types; of the latter the *Faerie Queene* or some famous ballad, such as the *Battle of Otterburn*.

Paradise Lost is a blank-verse narrative, of which the continuity is emphasised, rather than broken, by division into (1) paragraphs, (2) parts called "books." Paragraphs have much, if not entirely, the same *rationale* in continuous verse as in prose; and the full consideration of it is postponed until we deal with prose. It is enough to say now that very conspicuously in *Paradise Lost* and, in a measure, in every famous narrative and descriptive poem, whatever may be the outward signs of paragraphing, the paragraphing itself is rational and self-consistent. As to "books," it seems evident that in *Paradise Lost* the end of some of the books is a mere halting-place for the relief of strain. Such, *e.g.*, is the end of Book V. in the middle of Raphael's long discourse to Adam and Eve. In other cases

the end of a "book" marks a new stage in the evolution of the narrative, and is natural rather than artificial. What, *e.g.*, could be more cardinal and critical in the story of the Fall as Milton conceived and tells it, than the opening of the great conference in Pandemonium where the infernal assault on the world was planned? And what, accordingly, could be a happier effect of style than the pause on the eve of the conference at the end of Book I.—a pause made all the more effective and significant by the description which immediately precedes it of the preparations for the conference, a description which satisfies as much as it whets the reader's appetite?

We thus seem justified in concluding that in continuous narrative verse the better art is shown by making the end of large divisions correspond to the cardinal points of the narrative.

In the *Faerie Queene* there is a triple division of books, cantos, and stanzas. The books are an essential part of the scheme of the poem as Spenser carefully formed it. The cantos answer to the books of *Paradise Lost*; they mark stages of the narrative. The fact that each book contains twelve cantos would lead one to suspect some arbitrariness and artificiality in these divisions. This is, no doubt, to some extent, the case; but Spenser was enough an artist to prevent such arbitrariness and artificiality from being too evident.

From our present point of view, it is neither the books nor the cantos of the *Faerie Queene* that interest us, but the stanzas into which each canto is divided. We recognise a retarding effect in Spenser's stanzas which is not to be found in Milton's paragraphs. Milton's paragraphs, Chaucer's paragraphs, and the paragraphs of all the best

narrative poetry, help the narrative, the story-telling; they are an agency of its progress. On the other hand, the *Faerie Queene* seems to show that to break up a narrative into stanzas of equal length is to hinder and retard narrative flow; to tempt to digression and desultoriness; to interfere with proportion in description; to subject objective variations to the rigid purposes of the artist. The narrative impulse as such is an urgent impulse; it prompts to continuity. If the narrative flow is to be broken into stanzas, the continuity, we feel, will be least interrupted by (1) stanzas of irregular length, as in *Marmion* or *Christabel*, regulated by dramatic elements in the story; (2) regular short verses, as in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or a typical ballad, where the stanzas do little more than punctuate. But where, as in the *Faerie Queene*, the stanzas are of nine lines and have a complex rhyme-system, there is a great tendency to subordinate narrative to the elaboration of detail—it may be of personal characterisation, of costume, or of comment. Each stanza has a kind of solid, self-contained completeness which is in itself unfavourable to narrative.

It is a critical commonplace to recognise Spenser's deficiency as a narrative poet. In mere narrative gift he was excelled by Byron; and it is instructive to compare the narrative efficiency of the Spenserian stanza in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* with that of the irregular stanza in *Mazeppa*, which follows the crises of the story. In *Childe Harold* Byron was not hampered, as Spenser was in the *Faerie Queene*, by allegorical *double entendre*. Also *Childe Harold* is descriptive and even didactic rather than strictly narrative. Yet it is full of narrative, narrative made halting and desultory by the metre, while *Mazeppa* careers

along with a movement in which theme and expression are indistinguishable.

2. *Lyrical Poetry*.—In the typical lyric there are two kinds of section about which a word may be said : (1) the stanza; (2) (in more elaborate compositions) the strophe. Both of these are as distinctly sections as the paragraphs, chapters, or “ books ” of a prose composition.

(1) The typical form of stanza is the rhyming quatrain.

“ Come live with me and be my Love
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.” ¹

The problem is the relation of the stanza to the lyrical sentence and paragraph. We ask: Has the lyrical poet difficulty in making his stanzas coincide with his sentences and paragraphs? Ought he to make it an object that they should coincide?

If a lyric is to be really *sung*, we shall expect each stanza to be a sentence, if not a paragraph, as it is unmistakably, e.g., in Tennyson's *Ask me no more*.² We shall expect to find a stage, a halting-place, at the end of each “ verse,” a stage so prolonged (as compared with the mere phrase- or sentence - stage) as to be expressed in the musical accompaniment—by some symphonic bars, it may be, or by some important modulation. Or is actual music practically out of the question, and is the lyric an outburst of strong personal emotion, such as love?

“ Whoe'er she be,
That not impossible she,
That shall command my heart and me;

¹ Marlowe.

² One of the lyrics in *The Princess*,

Where'er she lie,
 Lock'd up from mortal eye,
 In shady leaves of destiny:

Till that ripe birth
 Of studied Fate stand forth,
 And teach her fair steps to our Earth;

Till that divine
 Idea take a shrine
 Of crystal flesh, through which to shine!

Meet you her, my wishes
 Bespeak her to my blisses,
 And be ye call'd, my absent kisses! " ¹

Grammatically these stanzas form a period-sentence; but, so fully felt is the force of each triplet-stanza, that the effect is that of a paragraph, rather than a sentence.

In many short lyrics there is a distinct double or triple organisation which is reflected in the number of the stanzas. *E.g.* we feel that *Blow, blow, thou winter wind* in *As You Like It*, which requires its two stanzas, would be ruined by a third; and that Wordsworth's *She was a Phantom of Delight*, to which three stanzas are essential, would be ruined by a fourth.

(2) The typical strophe-lyric is the Ode. In different odes the strophes (often distinguished as strophes and antistrophes) are differently organised; but always the effect is paragraphic. In Spenser's *Epithalamion*, *e.g.*, the strophes (eighteen lines) end each with a refrain; and, after the introduction, each strophe describes a definite stage in the progress of the wedding-day. In Dryden's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, the divisions are almost entirely dependent on prosody, and sense and sound are inextric-

¹ R. Crashaw.

ably interwoven. In the same poet's *Alexander's Feast* the first strophe portrays clearly the scene of the poem; the six strophes that follow express a marked sequence of the powers and effects of music. In Gray's odes, where there is careful imitation of Greek models, the divisions are formal, wayward, and musical. In Wordsworth's *Immortality* ode there is the waywardness without the formality. In Matthew Arnold's odes there is no waywardness, and the strophes are regular lyrical paragraphs.

3. *Dramatic Poetry*.—In drama proper the divisions (Acts and Scenes) are sometimes natural and vital, sometimes artificial and non-essential. The division into scenes is to a large extent determined by spectacular, and even mechanical, conditions and necessities, and is indefinitely variable. The division into acts is another and more important matter which, however, only slightly concerns us here. Acts are essentially the expression of plot, and as such are, of course, common to prose and poetic drama. They are an agency of unity; for the unity of drama is in its plot.

4. *Didactic and Expository Poetry*.—Of didactic and argumentative poetry it is to be said on the whole that continuity is the chief requisite, and that logical paragraphing supplies the divisions that are chiefly required. But in poetry which is expository or descriptive the stanza is often a conspicuous aid. Divisions are a means of expressing plurality in unity. Description, whether of a face, a costume, a character, or a landscape, aims at expressing totality through detail; and, in the hands of a true literary artist, a succession of uniform stanzas may be made to convey the sense of the whole in the parts better than a piece of continuous blank or rhyming heroic verse. A large

part of the excellence of the *Faerie Queene* consists in such elaboration of detail in description through the stanza as makes a figure like that of Una in the first book, or a place like the Bower of Bliss in the second, an immortally luminous and charming picture.

II. PROSE.—In so far as prose is utilitarian, its main business, in all its kinds, may be said to be either *exposition* or *narrative*. The former we think of quasi-metaphorically in relation to *space*: it is a process of laying-out, or fixing boundaries; it resembles partly the work of the settler, partly that of the cartographer. Narrative we think of in relation to *time*; its characteristic movement is sequence. Description is a slighter, more superficial form of exposition.

The *treatise*, whether religious, philosophical, or scientific, is essentially expository. Its aim is the definition and arrangement of a more or less complex subject-matter.

Take a work which is at the foundation of English philosophy, Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.¹ If we read the Epistle to the Reader which is prefixed to the Essay, we find how much of the explorer and cartographer Locke was. He tells us that he wrote first for his own "information" and then for that of others who felt themselves as imperfectly informed as he was himself. He entered on his work strongly convinced of the importance of the human faculty called "understanding," but in much ignorance as to its nature and limits; and his Essay was an effort, partly self-helping, partly altruistically utilitarian, to determine these. Its aim is *limitation*; to find out, and then to show, what the understanding can do, that it may not waste itself in attempts at the impossible.

¹ Other typical and famous expository treatises are Mill's *Political Economy* and Butler's *Analogy*.

That we may learn what it cannot do, we are shown what it is; Locke thinks of understanding partly as a kind of sensitive plate, partly as an instrument of power; and the *Essay* treats it accordingly. He begins by exploding a false notion of the understanding, viz., that it has "innate ideas"; this process occupies the first "book" of his *Essay*. There follows, in the second book, the exposition of the true characteristics or contents of the understanding—the "ideas." It takes thirty-three chapters to complete this exposition; ideas are, as we might expect, so numerous and complex. Again, ideas are so closely related to words and so impotent without them that Locke, before considering what the understanding makes of its ideas, gives a book to words. Then he is ready for the final section of his undertaking, the exposition of the powers or achievements of the understanding; in other words, the nature and value of true "knowledge," as distinguished from what only seems to be knowledge.

Generally speaking, we may lay it down that the more systematically expository is the treatise, the more does it call for division. But a word of caution is needed. The divisions, the paragraphs, chapters, books, or what not, ought to be perfectly adequate to the full exposition of the theme, but they must not be felt to hinder or embarrass it, as sometimes they do. It is possible to make divisions so prominent and elaborate as to look like scaffolding, concealing the structure which it is the writer's business to show. The conception of exposition as the demarcation of a region in space is only metaphorically exact; and such demarcation cannot supersede the movement which must characterise every composition deserving to be called literary, and which is a progress in time. No obligation of

style is more stringent, and no triumph of style is more signal, than the transference (so to put it) of exposition into narrative. Exposition has little or no literary value which, however logical and complete it may be, gives the reader no sense of progressive movement, as though the ground were being traversed as well as marked out.

Both the *history* and the *biography* may be, to some extent, treatises in the sense we understand here; and there are theorists who hold that the true historian is neither more nor less than a man of science, with no literary obligations proper at all. But we have seen that of history as actually achieved and to be studied in its masterpieces (and the same may be said of biography), narrative is the essential method. For narrative, as the masterpieces show us, a simple section-system suffices. Careful paragraphing, chapters marking crises in the story, or giving relief in the prosecution of the task, are all that is wanted. Of such divisional systems Macaulay's and Froude's *Histories* are typical; and the same may be said of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, though here the writer combines, with the rarest art, a splendid narrative style with the exposition of a theme evidently preconceived as a great whole to be shown, quasi-spatially, in its parts. The same expository bent is manifest in Carlyle's *French Revolution* and *Frederick the Great*; and in these works the result is a somewhat complex division-system.

Neither exposition nor narrative is the right word for the method of the typical *essayist*. The typical essay is, as we have maintained, imaginative rather than scientific prose. It is egoistic, incalculable, brief. We may, if we choose, say that Bacon expounds envy in his essay on that subject, or that Charles Lamb expounds imperfect sym-

pathies in his essay so called; but in these compositions we must admit that there is no idea of laying out territory or setting boundaries. Their method is *illustrative*. The essays are egoistic, the writers take no responsibility for explaining envy and imperfect sympathies to others. It is assumed that they and their readers know what envy and imperfect sympathies are, and the object of the writers is to discuss them, to exhibit them in this light and that light mainly (as it appears) for the sake of self-expression in a spontaneous and desultory manner and with striking brevity. Such a method evidently requires the minimum of division. In Bacon's Essay on Envy there is a series of paragraphs dealing with instances of envy, one after another; in Lamb's essay called *Imperfect Sympathies* there is a series of paragraphs on the unattractiveness of Scots, Jews, Negroes, and Quakers. There is no further division in either case; and in such essays no other is needed. The essay of the other type, *i.e.* the "review"-article of historical study or literary criticism, is essentially a brief treatise, and may be narrative or expository. Whether it is actually divided otherwise than paragraphically is generally a matter of convention and convenience.

The *novelist* unites in himself the potentialities of many other writers. He is much of a historian, much of a biographer; his prerogative of fiction gives him much of the essayist's liberty; he may adopt the manner of the journalist; he may have the aim of the philosopher; his prose may contain, or be wholly composed of, what can only be called prose-poetry. We therefore expect to find in novels many varieties of division.

In the early years of the English novel proper, *i.e.* within the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, we

find section-systems in full operation, some of which have remained typical. Historically, the English novel may be said to have been initiated by Defoe on the lines of continuous narrative recounting a series of adventures. Externally, the essay of Addison and Steele seemed the model: short stories, with no sections except paragraphs, occurred in the *Spectator* and elsewhere; and, in *Robinson Crusoe* and other works, Defoe produced much longer fictions on similar lines. The next step was taken by Richardson, who, though less afraid of length than even Defoe, derived his novel from the letter rather than the essay, and so was driven to frequent breaks in narrative. For Richardson, the predominant interest of fiction was psychological rather than (as for Defoe) circumstantial; and that interest was favoured by the constant succession of epistolary soul-photographs.

Smollett and Fielding between them finally sent forth the novel on its way. In Smollett's hands it was (except in *Humphry Clinker*) the narrative, autobiographical or not, of a sequence of adventures with little complexity of plot, divided into chapters containing each one definite adventure or little group of adventures, each adventure within the group being indicated in the chapter-title.

In *Tom Jones* Fielding initiated another and more intrinsically important type of novel-structure. To the student of Style this is one of the most interesting books in English literature. It is divided into "books" as well as chapters, the books as well as the chapters being carefully named. Although the names are generally chronological, a little inspection makes it clear that the author's real method is expository rather than narrative, and that each division is part of a consistent scheme. Fielding evidently

grasped his theme with a conscious completeness which was much more than a sense of chronological unity.¹ The most important function served by the division into books is the opportunity afforded to the writer of indulging his literary self-consciousness, which he expresses in the first chapter of each book—a kind of essay marking a pause in the narrative, and enabling him to survey and appraise his method.² We must, therefore, regard Fielding's most important work as expository, that of a tale-teller who conceives his theme as a territory to be laid out, and shown to the reader as such.

In *Tristram Shandy* Sterne initiated yet another kind of fiction, the novel of character-drawing with unlimited caprice and humour. Here there are books as well as chapters, but they can hardly be said to be expository, or, indeed, anything more than opportunities for the indulgence of caprice.

After these early masters, the next great influence on the novel was that of Walter Scott, among whose methods the expository gave way to the narrative. His movement was frankly sequential and temporal; and his section-system, naturally, was one of chapters only.

On the whole, our conclusion must be that in the English novel three types early and continuously show themselves—the narrative, the expository, and the capricious or prose-poetic; and that the more expository is the type, the more complex is the section-system.

It remains to try to get rather closer to the *rationale*

¹ See Fielding's *Amelia*, Book I. Chap. 1. Also *Joseph Andrews*, Book II. Chap. 1. In this his earliest novel, Fielding, with characteristic literary self-consciousness, expounds his theory of divisions.

² Cf., e.g., the last paragraph of Book II. Chap. 1.

of the three great varieties of section—the paragraph, the chapter, and the “part” or “book.”

1. *Paragraphs*.—In considering paragraphs we must remember that they need not be actually made (*i.e.* formally expressed) by the author. The formal expression of such divisions is largely a matter of fashion; and it is as potentialities, if not as actualities, that paragraphs are important for Style. They ought to be of the essence of the composition, and it is for careful search to find them, if they are unsignalised by conventional marks. They are articulations of thought, not vagaries of clerkship.

The paragraph in prose and (*mutatis mutandis*) in continuous verse seems to serve three chief purposes: to express (1) limits in exposition or demarcation; (2) stages of narrative and evolutionary progress; (3) digression.

(1) *Limits in Exposition or Demarcation*.—These limits are of varying importance: some are important enough to prescribe “books” or other large sections; some to prescribe chapters; some paragraphs. The typical treatise-maker (*e.g.* John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy*) conceives his subject as a group or tract of fixed principles, interrelated in the nature of things, and gradated in order of importance; and, if (as Mill was) he is a master of style, the interrelation and gradation of his theme will be clearly expressed in the section-system of his treatise.

Mill’s paragraphing is very instructive, and the student may learn a great deal by examining the paragraph-structure of a single chapter, *e.g.* Chapter I. of Book I., *Of the Requisites of Production*.

We find that some of the paragraphs are numbered (and named in the Table of Contents) and some unnumbered. There are in the chapter four large numbered paragraphs.

The first is named "Requisites of Production, what"—the name being, to all intents and purposes, identical with the name of the chapter. It consists of three shorter unnamed paragraphs of which the first names two "requisites" ("land" and "labour"); the second makes various statements about those which help the reader to comprehend them; and the third shows that "powers" (*e.g.* water-power) are agents of production as well as such "inert" natural objects as soil.

The second numbered paragraph is called "The Function of Labour Defined." Its object is to show that some appropriate natural objects themselves supply labour; and that labour, in the ordinary sense, *i.e.* human agency, only starts and guides natural forces. It has three unnumbered paragraphs, which state with increasing generality and emphasis, a thesis laid down explicitly at the beginning of the third of them, that "labour in the physical world is always and solely employed in putting objects in motion; the properties of matter, the laws of nature, do the rest."

The name of the third numbered paragraph is a question: "Does Nature contribute more to the Efficiency of Labour in some occupations than in others?" In other words, what is the proportion between the two "requisites of production," crudely distinguished in the opening unnamed paragraph? The paragraph is not subdivided, and it virtually answers the question in the negative, and decides that there is no ascertainable proportion.

The fourth and final paragraph is called, "Some natural agents limited, others practically unlimited, in quantity," a title which is but a short abstract of the paragraph itself. It is divided into two unnumbered paragraphs; the first

giving instances of (1) limited, (2) unlimited natural objects. The function of the second, which is unnecessary for the immediate purpose of the exposition, is expressed in the last sentence of the chapter: "This subject will hereafter be discussed at length; but it is often useful to anticipate, by a brief suggestion, principles and deductions which we have not yet reached the place for exhibiting and illustrating fully." The chief principle and deduction are no less than these: the limited amount of land, and the valuelessness (in exchange) of all unlimited commodities—cornerstones, as it will turn out, of the building which is being made; or (to use our other metaphor) plots of the greatest importance in the country which is being demarcated.

On the whole, it is difficult to abuse seriously—at least in the treatise proper, *i.e.*, the scientific treatise—the paragraph of exposition or demarcation, except, indeed, by a mania for arrangement by subdivision which is a disease extending much beyond paragraphing. In description, which we here take as included in exposition, and as itself including the psychological analysis of the historian, biographer, and novelist, there is more option and greater stylistic interest. The wish to be vivid and the wish not to be tiresome may prompt a descriptive or analytic writer to paragraph wherever there is change of theme, though only from particular to particular; and his style may thus lack continuity and dignity; it may be describable as patchy and jerky. He can only, it would seem, avoid these results by never ceasing to regard the thing he is describing or analysing as a unity through all its constituent parts and details, a unity which will be lost sight of by licentiousness in paragraphing. Even details he will try to group rather than present in single file.

(2) *Stages of Narrative and Evolutionary Progress.*—These are much more important as determinants of paragraphing than limits of exposition.

Under progress we here bring two things: (a) succession in time; (b) evolution of thought.

The first is the progress of typical narrative, *e.g.* :—

“The programme for the week is a full one.

“On Monday, the Museum will be visited in the morning. In the afternoon some hours will be spent in the public park. In the evening there will be a public dinner.

“Tuesday will be devoted to the churches. The cathedral will be visited in the morning. In the afternoon St. Clement’s and St. Laurence will receive a share of attention,” etc., etc.

The *rationale* is simple: there is gradation; events measured in parts of a day are referred to in sentences or phrases; those measured in days in paragraphs. Narrative is in many respects akin to description, and many stylistic rules applicable to the one are applicable to the other. As, in descriptive features, constituents and details ought to be grouped, so, in narrative, events ought to be gradated according to a clearly conceived scale; proportion must be observed; the narrative should have dignity and not ignore or obscure unity. The paragraph of narrative progress is abused when these things are forgotten; where the narrative is baldly tabular or merely chronological, and paragraphs succeed one another like the ticks or strokes of a timepiece.

On the other hand, there is, especially in fiction, such a thing as so-called “dramatic” narrative; narrative, that is, which presents events, in themselves momentous or exciting, as happening with unexpected incidents and great rapidity of movement. Such narrative may require,

or at least plausibly justify, very short paragraphs. Charles Reade, an acknowledged master of dramatic narrative, revels in paragraphs of this kind.

“Wouverman peered round the bark cautiously; there was the arrow’s point still aimed at him. He saw it shine. He dared not move from his shelter.

“When he had been at peep-bo some minutes, his companions came up in great force.

“Then, with a scornful laugh, Martin vanished, and presently was heard to ride off on the mule.

“All the men ran up together. The high ground commanded a view of a narrow but almost interminable glade.

“They saw Gerard and Margaret running along at a prodigious distance; they looked like gnats; and Martin galloping after them *ventre à terre*.”¹

It is open to question whether the tendency (obvious in these days) of this kind of thing to prevail in narrative which is not dramatic, is not a movement away from the dignity and unity which are essential to narrative in general.

The kind of progress which is evolution of thought presents more difficulties. Every writer, even of the higher kinds of narrative, realises that it is often difficult, if not impossible, to plan ordinary paragraphs in advance. If we sit down to fill in the outline of a chapter on any theme, we soon find that a process goes on within us which we can only call one of evolution or unfolding; thoughts which we began with knowing as points, as we endeavour to express them, seem to unroll and expand, to ramify and radiate. In this process both sentences and paragraphs take shape. It seems to writer and reader a progress, a

¹ Charles Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Chap. 22.

process in time; and a process at varying rates of speed. One is rapid and is expressed in sentences; the other is slower, and is expressed in paragraphs.

Again, in the development of a theme, something of special importance often presents itself to a writer: something to be made prominent, repeated, enforced, or illustrated. When this happens, the writer, in order to bespeak fitting attention from his readers, isolates or elevates in a paragraph the repetition, enforcement, or illustration.

Instances of the progressive paragraph, narrative and evolutionary, abound in the work of that great master of paragraphing, Macaulay. Thus, *e.g.*, in Chapter XVII. of the *History of England*, we find the first six paragraphs strictly registering progress in time. (1) King William lands on Goree. (2) He enters The Hague. (3) He attends a sitting of the States-General. (4) A Congress meets. (5) The king attends a sitting of the Congress. (6) An important announcement is made as to foreign policy.

In paragraph (6) a sentence occurs which interrupts narrative progress, and suggests paragraphing of a different kind. "On this occasion, as on every other important occasion during his reign, he (King William) was his own minister for foreign affairs." Here we may suppose (there is at least nothing absurd or improbable in the supposition) that the historian, as he wrote, suddenly realised that the practice of the king needed justification on constitutional grounds. At any rate, he proceeds so to justify it; and the justification takes several paragraphs. In the first, a short one, Macaulay asserts as a presumption in favour of William's conduct the fact that no statesman of any party condemned it. In the second, he maintains that the practice of the constitution has often differed, with general approba-

tion, from its strict theory. In the third, a long one, he charges with inconsistency those who condemn William's arbitrary conduct in diplomacy while approving it in military strategy and tactics. He brings both under the same rule, and justifies William's diplomatic absolutism by his great diplomatic ability.

Those paragraphs seem to expound an evolutionary progress: we feel that the historian finds an idea grow and expand as he looks at and handles it.

A similar progress is to be traced in the movement by which the historian returns to narrative—a movement which prevents the constitutional argument from seeming a digression. The movement turns on William's diplomatic skill; *e.g.*, says the historian, no one could manage the pope as well as the king could; no one else could have kept him as an ally without offending Protestant feeling. This assertion has a paragraph to itself. The narrative is to return to the Congress at The Hague, and resume its march from that point. The paragraph about William's power over the pope is followed by one emphasising his services to Protestantism. Yet another paragraph finds further proof of his diplomatic skill in his success in holding together the coalition (embodied in the Congress) in spite of its lack of inherent unity and uprightness, which lack is the real theme of the paragraph.

Then comes a paragraph of strong contrast, in which the unity and strength of the enemy, France, is set forth. And now the way is clear for resuming the chronological narrative with the French king's countermove to The Hague Congress, the siege of Mons.

As expressed in prose style, the progress of thought (*i.e.*, the evolution of a theme) presents itself as an irregular

movement. But to whom, we ask, does it so present itself? Primarily, of course, to the writer; by choosing it as his theme, he suffuses it with his subjectivity, and we must henceforward deal with it as, to some extent, a product of his individual will. In so speaking of it, we are using metaphor. By a *product* we mean, or partly or chiefly mean, something manufactured out of raw material. But at least when we are dealing with progress in prose, we think of the author, less as the manufacturer of a product, than as the director of an onward movement. We think of his theme as moving towards an issue, end, or goal, and moving with the kind of motion prescribed by the author. But is it *wholly* prescribed by the author? Is there not an inherent and intrinsic propriety of movement in the theme which the writers should recognise, and to which he should conform? Or (to drop metaphor and to speak literally) is an author at liberty to make his progress perfectly regular, and write, *e.g.*, in sentences only?

We at once feel, surely, that he is not; and that, if he did so, he would be using a bad style when a better was at his command. For his power in the expression of his theme or thought is not really absolute. Thought (themes) does, in the nature of things, progress irregularly, *i.e.*, with pauses of varying length; and a style is bad or good according to the fidelity with which the writer reflects (so to put it) these irregularities, these longer and shorter pauses, in the section-system of his work.

Of this inherent or objective movement of thought, the paragraph is the most striking exponent. Almost any kind of idiosyncratic trick may be played by a writer with sentences and chapters; but the chief part of paragraphing is done by the nature of things, and the writer can but

register or fail to register. Arbitrary paragraphing can hardly fail to be erroneous paragraphing.

There is obviously much option in the use of the evolutionary paragraph, and there are, equally obviously, many opportunities of abuse and misuse. We think of the progress of a theme both as a movement in time, a radiation or ramification of substance, and a surface of different levels; and behind each and all of these metaphors there lie the facts that pauses for ear and eye must be made at irregular intervals, that certain sentences must be fenced off in groups; and that writer and readers may not always agree as to the proper length of the pauses and the proper size of the groups. The essential matter is that both writer and readers should deal intelligently with the theme as it expands, ramifies, and radiates; and that the writer, however open to criticism or amendment his paragraphing may be, should paragraph reflectively rather than at haphazard, and should be able to defend his system in the names of logic and proportion, when, in the names of logic and proportion, it is attacked. It is also important to remember that on evolutionary, as on mere narrative, progress there lie the obligations of dignity, continuity, and unity; and that any sensational or gratuitously didactic isolation of "points" in the onward flow may constitute an unpardonable breach of those obligations; and may reduce literature to the level of a blackboard-lesson or an advertisement.

(3) *Digression*.—A common form of paragraph is the paragraph of digression, when the author breaks the onward flow of his theme, in order to say something suggested by it, rather than, properly speaking, forming part of it.

Thus strictly conceived, the digressive paragraph is somewhat akin to the parenthesis in the sentence. As in the sentence the parenthesis, so in the chapter the digressive paragraph, means suspension and delay; when it prevails, the style is discontinuous, nerveless, and rambling. The resemblance, however, is not very close. The parenthesis is used, when it is used most legitimately, to increase lucidity by giving information in very brief compass. By a skilful writer this may be done without the sense of serious suspension and delay; it need hardly involve even uncertainty or break in what is often called rhythm. But the digressive paragraph (if it is purely digressive) cannot by the most skilful artist be made other than interruptive; at best it will seem a footnote caught trespassing. Where its frequency is not, as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, the expression of exceedingly idiosyncratic humour, or, as so often in De Quincey, the freak of a miscellaneously learned essayist, it can hardly fail to be the index of a rambling mind.

2. *The Chapter*.—The *rationale* of the chapter, like that of the paragraph, is full of interest; but it is an easier *rationale* than that of the paragraph. It is made easier by the fact which we have already noticed, namely, that the chapter-section is more arbitrary, more within the option of the writer, than the paragraph-section.

To some extent, of course, chapters have much the same objective propriety as many paragraphs. In fiction, where the writer has unlimited power of invention, the theme may present itself, to writer and reader alike, as naturally articulated, the chapters being the articulation. In novels such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's, novels which combine great unity of theme with great simplicity of section-

system, the chapters seem to be determined by the evolution of the theme itself; they strike us as *inevitable*. The typical essay, or piece of prose-poetry, where there is great scope for invention, is too short for chapters.

But in all prose works chapters may, in their turn, perform the function of paragraphs in regulating the progress of a theme. They may be resting-places for eye or ear and mind, made convenient by their station at real halting-places of thought. This we shall expect to be especially true of works of argument or exploration, especially works of philosophy. Such, *e.g.*, are the chapters of that admirably composed work, Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*.

Many chapters, however, are arranged on principles which are more external and more conspicuously optional. We may consider some of those principles in order.

(1) *Chapters make Succession clear without Monotony*.—In a great many prose works of all sorts, as we have seen, the theme presents itself as a succession of points, which are expressed as separate paragraphs. For relief to the mind from the oppression of continuity, certain of the paragraphs are included within one chapter, and the succession is resumed in another. This is the simplest and most obvious form of chapter-making.

Chapters of succession in this sense are to be found abundantly in most forms of prose. They are, in fact, an expression or reflection of the most elementary conception of a theme. They are especially prominent in history, and in fiction, where there is chronological narrative. In the early chapters of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, for example, after the main thread of the work has been taken up at the election of Commodus in Chapter IV., the chapters express

the succession of Emperors, their length being deliberately equalised for the sake of convenience, but made to follow steadily the chronological line. *Waverley*, Scott's first essay in the novel, is an instance of fiction similarly treated. The chapters, one after another, express the succession of incidents invented by the author.

There is little possibility of right or wrong in the management of such chapters. It is only necessary to have a clear understanding of the succession of incidents on the one hand, and, on the other, some tact as to when a reader or listener begins to be bored, and needs a new chapter.

(2) *Chapters are an expression of Exposition or Demarcation.*—We see exposition so often, in treatises, in histories, in novels, that we are tempted almost to regard it as the characteristic, predominant work of prose. In exposition so understood, a very important part is played by chapters, a part which is no way indicated by the word succession, which is a time-word, a word of chronology. In a typical work of exposition, a typical treatise, or a "history," whether in Carlyle's sense or Fielding's, the work is conceived and mapped out as a whole; and the chapters express natural (so to call them) or essential divisions of the theme, so conceived and mapped out. Their precise function in this regard can hardly be understood apart from the complete scheme of the work which includes them, and which often includes also those larger divisions which we shall have to consider next. We could not have a better instance of this kind of division than the chapter-system of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. No historical work, of course, no narrative, can ignore the chronological succession of events; and Carlyle's *French Revolution* involves chronological narrative. But his chapters are

not formed like the early chapters of Gibbon. The chronological movement is concealed and implicit, and can be detected mainly in the "books" in which the chapters are grouped. The chapters are the analysis of the divisions expressed in the books.

For example, the first book deals with what in Carlyle's scheme is the beginning of the Revolution, the death of Louis XV. The chapters which make up the book are four; and, from the chronological point of view, they deal with one very definite moment. But it is not chronology that we think of as we read the chapters. In the first chapter we have a picture, composed with an art which conceals art, of the quality of French royalty and the state of France while the King lay on his deathbed. The second chapter, "Realised Ideals," expands the picture. The third, "Viaticum," presents the last sacraments of Louis as a symbol of the division in French life between semblance and fact. Prepared as he now is to appreciate the bearing of the death, the reader in the fourth chapter is told of the death itself, conceived, not as a mere chronological point, but as the beginning of an era. "But thus, in any case, with a sound absolutely like thunder, has the Horologe of Time struck, and an old Era passed away."

(3) *Chapters are Named or Nameless.*—The question whether chapters are or are not named is less purely external and more important than we might be inclined to think. If we consider the matter carefully we shall realise that the named chapter represents the elementary, simple, unsophisticated type, and this whether it is a chapter of succession or a chapter of exposition. If the writer conceives and presents his theme as a series of points, he will conceive and present the points or groups of points as definite

and named, or at least easily nameable. If he considers his theme as a plural unity, a complex whole, to be analysed and subdivided, or as (metaphorically speaking) a territory to be laid out, he will conceive his elements or subdivisions with equal definiteness, *i.e.* with equal nameability. If, *i.e.*, I am writing a history of the Reformation in England, I may conceive the Reformation as a series of events in time, stages of the Divorce Question, Acts of Parliament, etc., and I shall name my chapters accordingly; the Divorce Question, the Act of Annates, the Submission of the Clergy, the Act of Supremacy, etc. Or I may conceive it as a plural unity to be expounded, a complex whole to be analysed; I shall be concerned with causes and effects, with tendencies this way and tendencies that way; I shall have chapters on foreshadowings of the Reformation; on civil resistance to the Papacy; on doctrinal changes; on foreign influence; and so on.

In chronological narrative, or any prose which proceeds by way of series or succession, and where the points are too numerous to form chapters singly, the simplest form of chapter-naming is to name the leading points *seriatim* in the chapter-name, as is done in history, *e.g.* in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, and, in fiction, in Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle* and *Roderick Random*. Such a title is a kind of abridged abstract of the following chapter, or an abridged list of named paragraphs.

The most interesting problems of chapter-naming occur in novels, where, with the privilege of fiction, the author has matters entirely in his own hand. In *Tom Jones*, and, to a less extent, in *Amelia*, Fielding introduced what we may call the cryptic chapter-name, the name which "half reveals and half conceals" the contents of the chapter,

whets curiosity and mystifies it, and which in itself may form a kind of dainty or witty epigram. His example was much followed by, *e.g.*, Dickens and Thackeray.

The *rationale* of this lies in the element of secrecy in plot, which would be outraged if the titles of the chapters could be read in the table of contents as a continuous revelation of the entanglement and *dénoûment* of the story.

The unnamed chapter represents a more developed and sophisticated type, because the divisions and halts which it marks may be of too subtle a kind to be definitely nameable.

There are, however, two kinds of unnamed chapter which we may dismiss with a word.

(a) There is the chapter, familiar in the historical works of Macaulay and Froude and other historians, in which a complete abstract or list of themes is given in the table of contents. Here the namelessness of the chapter (whatever may have been the intentions of the author) has the effect of a kind of literary artifice. Most of the historians who have used it (and notably Macaulay and Froude) have regarded narrative as the chief business of history—narrative, with its paramount obligation of continuous succession. Such continuous succession can, of course, be expressed by named chapters, but with inferior artistic effect. From the point of view of ideal narrative—mere narrative regarded as an end in itself—the divisions, the separation of themes, expressed by chapter-names are too hard and definite, they are felt as interrupting rather than as illuminating. By anonymity of chapter the sense of interruption is avoided; while the requirements of lucidity are met by the brief analysis in the table of contents.

(b) Some unnamed chapters represent merely halting-

places for refreshment. Such halting-places may be fixed anywhere, at the end of any sentence; and the only principle in their formation will probably be the attainment as nearly as possible of equal length. Expressing neither progress of thought nor any true succession, such chapters have no importance for Style.

The most important kind of unnamed chapter is to be found in novels, and we may profitably trace it in the historical development of the British novel.

It is the good fortune of the eighteenth-century English novel that in the work of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, it so quickly attained both maturity and variety. In Defoe fiction was pure narrative, in which the continuity was enforced by the entire absence of chapters. The letters of which Richardson's novels are composed may be regarded as unnamed chapters of the most artistic kind, expressing an exceedingly subtle progress of emotional development. Fielding and Smollett, as we have seen, named their chapters, the former on principles of plot-exposition, the latter on principles of mere succession of adventures. The nameless chapter reappeared in Sterne, with whom it was a mere phase of humour, marking little but the incalculability of whimsy-flights. In Jane Austen there is the unnamed chapter, in which chronological progress is deftly combined with relief to attention and exposition of plot.

An interesting development is to be studied in the *Waverley Novels*. In *Waverley*, the chapters are named on the simple incident - succession principle. In *Guy Mannering*, the chapters are unnamed, and, instead of a name, there is a short motto, generally in verse, prefixed to each and foreshadowing its contents. So much did Scott

prefer this second thought, that only once, in *St. Roman's Well*, did he recur to the named chapter.

Dickens and Thackeray, as we have seen, named their chapters more or less after Fielding's cryptic and epigrammatic fashion. In *Shirley* and *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë named her chapters with great inventive brevity; in *Jane Eyre* (an autobiography) she did not name them at all.

George Eliot's methods of division are interesting in more ways than one. We shall have something to say about them when we are dealing, as we shall presently deal, with such large sections as "parts" or "books." Meanwhile it is enough to note that, like Scott, she passed from chapter-naming to chapter-anonymity, and that in her later books, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, she adopted Scott's device of prefixed mottoes. George Meredith, like Charlotte Brontë, named his chapters with inventive brevity. Mr. Thomas Hardy has changed from naming to anonymity. Many recent novelists, and notably Mr. Henry James, have (probably much under the influence of foreign models) disused the name "chapter," dividing their works into numbered sections, I., II., etc.¹ By this device, though small in itself, an additional blow has been struck at the unsophisticated simplicity of such a chapter-system as we find in *Waverley* or *Roderick Random*, and the divisions are made to seem more and more subtly marked stages in the evolution of plot or in the interplay of characters.

On the whole, our historical survey seems to show that

¹ Some contemporary novelists (*e.g.* Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. H. G. Wells) combine chapters (named or unnamed) with numbered sections.

in fiction the absence of chapter-names indicates developed craftsmanship, a subordination (so to say) of mechanical to spiritual progress, and a keener instinct for narrative movement. Similarly, we find it in those historians who—as notably Macaulay and Froude—regard narrative as the essential art of the finished historian.

3. *The Book or Part*.—The last section or subdivision which we have to consider is that large one called **Book**, or **Part**, or **Section**. It is the last we will consider, though it is not the last possible. Divisions which in this chapter we are treating as normally tripartite (paragraph, chapter, “books”) are in some cases much more than tripartite. Sometimes, *e.g.*, volumes are named (as in Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, where there is careful tripartite division as well); sometimes chapters are divided into numbered (and, it may be, named) sub-sections independently of the paragraph-system (as, *e.g.*, in Freeman’s *Norman Conquest*). But such extreme subdivision is too exceptional to need separate treatment. If the student knows the *rationale* of normal tripartite subdivision, he can easily apply it to that which is exceptional and abnormal.

A very slight survey of the different types or forms of prose will convince us that books or parts (which I will henceforward for the sake of brevity and clearness refer to as “parts”) are almost confined to a very limited number of such forms. They are a characteristic of what we have distinguished as *exposition* or *demarcation*; the method, that is, of the writer who conceives his work as a unity in plurality, a complex to be analysed, a territory to be laid out. It has little kinship with the prose of mere succession, mere chronology, mere narrative; or with the subtle indefinable progress of much modern fiction.

In fact we may regard parts as belonging exclusively to the systematic treatise on the one hand, and to a special kind of history and novel on the other.

(1) What rules seem, in the nature of the case, to regulate the use of parts in the systematic treatise?

We must surely reply that the parts must be arranged so as to help logic and lucidity, and must not be so numerous as to hinder onward movement, that sense of evolution or progress which writers of every kind ought to feel and convey. How parts may do good service, almost any well-arranged book, *e.g.* Locke's *Treatise on the Human Understanding* or Mill's *Political Economy*, will show. The abuse of parts, and the injury which they may do to literary effect, need, perhaps, more insistence. Very systematic writers may have what we must call a morbid love of clearness and definition; they may forget that style ought to be artistic without being self-conscious; that even the system-maker must get on; and that one may over-emphasise one's sections as well as one's words or phrases. John Austin, a writer of some eminence in the last century, the author of a treatise called *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, is a conspicuous instance of the literary vice of over-definition of this kind. His work, it is true, consists of a series of lectures, which have special obligations and privileges, and in which arrangement may legitimately be made more prominent than in literary composition proper. But from Austin's method we may learn the tendencies which lead to that over-prominence of definition of which the abuse of parts is an evidence.

One of the hardest tasks which a writer can essay is the combination of literary progress with careful and systematic subdivision, and it is a task for which it is almost im-

possible to lay down express rules. One can do little more than say: this writer's genius makes him competent to the task; that writer's does not. The student will probably learn more from a careful study of, *e.g.*, Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* or Freeman's *Norman Conquest* than from anything that could be said about the question in general. In the former work he will find the elaborate section-system, always characteristic of Carlyle, no bar to the essential narrative progression of a history; in the latter, in spite of Freeman's considerable narrative gifts, he will feel hindrance at every turn.

In novels, the part expresses, more than any other division, the point of junction between (or, if we prefer it, the moment of transition from) the temporal to the spatial conception of progress, from narrative to exposition. Let us recur once more to the outstanding model, *Tom Jones*. All the "books" are named, and, with very few exceptions, named chronologically. But there are eighteen books, and the action of the novel is practically confined to a short time in the young manhood of the hero; therefore divisions so numerous (besides chapters) can hardly be required by the mere chronology of the theme. We must therefore look closely to see whether the books are determined by anything else.

At the beginning of each there is (as we noted formerly) a short essay suggested by the story, and this in itself marks off the book. The primary effect of this initial chapter is that of the *intermezzo* in other forms of art, it stimulates interest by temporarily relieving tension. But it does more. It acts as a vital part of the section-structure. It marks off section from section, and turns the dynamical into the statical, what would have been mere chronological

narrative into the exposition of human nature. We may almost say that, within the unity of the whole plot (a plot famous for its unity), each book expounds a single and separate section of human nature and character. Thus the first book may be said to set forth the antithesis of Allworthy and the Blifils, and the strange pictures of Mistress Bridget's *affaires de cœur*; the second book is pre-eminently the book dedicated to Partridge's early adventures; the third presents the antithesis between Jones and his rival, young Blifil. The fourth introduces the heroine with a flourish of trumpets, made exceedingly emphatic by the introductory essay. "Our intention," says the author in this essay, "is to introduce our heroine with the utmost solemnity in our power, with an elevation of style, and all other circumstances proper to raise the veneration of our reader." And similarly throughout the novel.

The practice of Dickens in this respect is interesting. In the great majority of his books he adopted the narrative rather than the expository method, and is content with chapters. But there are some important exceptions. In *Hard Times*, published in 1854, "books" as well as chapters appear for the first time. Their number and their names deserve notice. There are three of them, which represent (metaphorically) a complete cyclic process, and are called "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering." In all Dickens' novels *motive* counts for a great deal; his are novels "with a purpose," more than mere tales told for amusement. But in *Hard Times* the motive is more prominent and (so to say) in harder relief than in, *e.g.*, *Dombey and Son* or *Bleak House*; the story is almost a tract, written in behalf of sentiment against materialism,

as embodied in the competitive industrialism of the mid-nineteenth century. Chronology takes a secondary place; a theme is expounded; it is the reaction of institutions on character and human happiness. Before the novelist's mind, a threefold process unfolds itself, a process describable metaphorically as sowing, reaping, and garnering. Seed is sown in certain human lives by certain erroneous ideals and methods: that occupies the first book. Certain results, all disastrous, follow in the second book like a harvest. And the third book shows the ultimate result, the proportionately small treasure of good grain housed at last.

§ Having once adopted the more complex section-system, Dickens would seem to have been pleased with it, since it reappears in *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. In all of these, construction (calling for exposition in its expression) is conspicuous. In *Little Dorrit* the thesis to be expounded is the effect on character of the change from poverty to wealth; it falls, therefore, into two books called "Poverty" and "Riches." *A Tale of Two Cities* is the most dramatic in form of Dickens' works; it is founded on an historical basis, and there throbs throughout it the rhythm of the French Revolution, the most dramatic movement in modern history. That it should be a three-book story is therefore most fitting. In *Our Mutual Friend* the motives are several, and the plot is too complex for the chronological method to suffice. Hence we find it divided into a succession of named books.

For Thackeray, whose plots are simple and loose, and whose method was that of the essay where it was not that of the chronological narrative, chapters suffice, except in *Esmond*. Charlotte Brontë never departed from narrative,

except for incidental comment; and she wrote in chapters only.

George Eliot's method is interesting. Of all famous British novelists she is perhaps the most expository. The mainspring of her fiction is the interaction of character and circumstances; and thus it is in no way surprising to find that, with very few exceptions, her novels are divided into "books" as well as chapters. It is notable also that her fiction became increasingly complex and expository, and that this phase culminated in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, where also the book-division is much less narrative and arranged in terms of time, than in earlier works, e.g., *The Mill on the Floss*.

We may sum up by saying that three methods are observable in the style of British fiction, namely, chronological narrative, exposition as in a treatise, and exposition almost as in a drama. Any two of the methods, or all three, may, of course, be combined; and in every novel there must be a substratum of narrative. Whenever the work ceases to be mainly narrative, and leans to exposition, either that of the quasi-treatise or the quasi-drama, it is fitting (if the author so wills) to mark the complexity which thereby results by a greater complexity of division than that of a mere succession of chapters.

CHAPTER IX

UNITY

THE subject on which we enter in this chapter is both very important and very difficult.

We must first make clear to ourselves what it is that we mean by unity.

We mean, first of all, the qualities loosely indicated by the words *arrangement* and *finish*. When we think of a composition in verse or prose as a whole, when we criticise it in that respect, we consider whether its merit and interest lie only or chiefly in its component parts or in some of them, or whether it does or does not also deserve praise or blame for the way in which its parts are combined and arranged so as to seem something more than a mere *collection*. Or we think of that wonderful and not easily definable quality which we call *finish*, that sense which comes to us, it may be at the close of each section, and certainly at the close of the whole composition, that the ultimate word has been said according to the author's design; and we ask about any work which may be in question, whether in reading it we have that sense or not.

But, on further consideration, we press to a deeper meaning and are driven to put more difficult questions. Sometimes we read a poem, and sometimes, though much seldomer, a prose work, which it would be quite inadequate to call well-arranged or finished, because we think of it as

a whole or a unity, and of its parts, if we think of them at all, as mere constituents of the whole, which, after all analysis, recurs persistently as our image of the work. We can easily verify this by calling up some famous short poem, a sonnet or a lyric. The unity of a sonnet, it is obvious, is essential to its merit. A desultory or rambling sonnet is indeed quite conceivable, and many such sonnets exist. But the typical and ideal sonnet is a whole, a unity, which we think of and enjoy as such, however much we may admire its component words, phrases, or sentences. In the case of a short lyric in stanzas, *e.g.*, Burns's "Ye banks an' braes o' bonnie Doon," the unity may be less closely knit than in the sonnet; but it is a unity none the less. We are not satisfied unless we read, recite, or sing it *all*. The longer the poem, the less likely is the ideal—if it be an ideal—of unity to be realised. Yet we are conscious of marked unity or wholeness in *Ædipus Tyrannus*, in *Samson Agonistes*, in Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*, in Wordsworth's *Michael*; and we are equally conscious of the absence of it in many poems of similar length.

What makes it difficult to attain wholeness in long poems goes far to make it still more difficult to attain it in prose compositions. But occasionally we read a book—a novel, it may be, such as Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*, or a treatise such as Butler's *Analogy*, which we cannot but persistently think of and recur to as a unity.

When unity in this sense is so strongly present to the reader, we are forced to think that the writer must have conceived his composition as a whole. In one sense, of course, autobiography alone can confirm this belief. We must get the writer himself to make known to us the genesis of his work. But in default of such information we have

to be content with inference; and no critical inference, surely, could be more legitimate than to argue that what the reader feels as unity must have been so felt by the writer.

But it is doubtful whether, in many cases, this amounts to a conscious preconception, on the part of the writer. From a critical estimate of appearances, it would rather seem that the attainment of unity is the result of a kind of sub-conscious instinct which impels to, and secures, order, finish, and completeness. This conclusion is forced on us when we reflect on the nature of all extended compositions in verse or prose; and still more if we ourselves try to produce such compositions. As we have already seen, the great general law of composition is progress, narrative or evolutionary: what we feel, in reading or in writing a work of any considerable length, is that we are carried along the course of a progress or evolution, in which one can only dimly or approximately see the end from the beginning. Apparently, mere length is here of great importance. It is not difficult to imagine a sonneteer, *e.g.*, conceiving his sonnet as a whole, and, in writing it, doing little more than turn ideas, or one idea, into words. And similarly a journalist, writing a short leading article on a very limited theme, evidently may "think it all out beforehand" (as the phrase goes) in a sense impossible to the writer of a treatise or a novel. Wherever there are length, articulation, and complexity, wherever, in reading, we are conscious of a wide expansion or a protracted evolution, we must look upon unity (if the work exhibits it) as a grace and consummation conferred by an unconscious or semi-conscious cosmic power in the author, presiding over and regulating the progress which he consciously controls.

The grace of unity, then, is often wanting to works in other respects, it may be, full of high merit. Yet it is important because it is an artist's ideal. It is clear that no painter, sculptor, architect, or musician could be content without some kind of preconception of his work as a whole; haphazard arrangement, haphazard sequence, and haphazard termination would, surely, be impossible to him. But literature, whether poetry or prose, is art; and to literature, surely, no ideal of the artist can be foreign or indifferent. There is here, however, a difficulty, which we may state, but can hardly hope to solve.

Although writers are artists, they are in one important respect different from other artists. A poem, a treatise, or a novel, whether we listen to it, recite it, or read it, appeals to different faculties, and produces a different effect, from a picture or a cathedral. The picture and the cathedral appeal to the eye, and are by the eye apprehended as wholes. They may, of course, be bad or good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory wholes: the picture may be a bad composition, and the cathedral a jumble of ill-assorting styles divided from each other by centuries; but none the less vision takes them in as wholes. Music is different from painting and architecture; but not so very different. Music (*i.e.* pure music without words) appeals to the ear as the other fine arts do to the eye, but (as they of course do not) by means of sequence in time. Yet musical effect, we see at once, is much more dependent on unity than literary effect. Music is intensely and inevitably formal; and to say that is to say in other words that we can only appreciate musical compositions when we hear them *as wholes*, *i.e.* from beginning to end. The strictness of musical form is but the expression of unity.

In literature the conditions are not so simple. To begin with, a book appeals indifferently to ear or eye, according as we listen to or read it. Again, it appeals to the rational intelligence in a sense in which other fine arts do not. It engages that intelligence, it may be, part by part and section by section; and when we finish the work, *i.e.* read or hear it from beginning to end, we may have a sense of sequence and accomplishment only, not of unity. Unity seems, as has already been said, an added grace which though inseparable from the perfect literary ideal, may yet be dispensed with in literary art, as it cannot be dispensed with in other fine arts.

How far the failure to attain the grace is avoidable, we cannot pause to discuss here in the abstract. We shall deal with the matter most profitably in connection with that general question of fitness which we have already found to be the central problem of Style.

I. Let us, then, first consider unity in poetry.

1. *Narrative (Epic) Poetry*.—We should naturally expect it to be harder to attain to unity in narrative than in other forms of poetry. For one thing, the obstacle of length is formidable. A poem in twenty-four books like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, or in twelve books like the *Æneid* or *Paradise Lost*, may very easily be loose in construction and rambling in method, and so fail to give the reader a sense of unity. With a large theme to treat, a poet, launching forth on a sea of blank verse or rhymed heroic measure, may well divagate widely, may change his course frequently, and may finally land himself and his reader at some unexpected port.

It is, therefore, not surprising that hardly any one of the world's greatest epics is conspicuous for unity. In some

the movement is rambling, the arrangement apparently haphazard, the expression in many respects apparently impulsive and unpremeditated. The frequency of episode also has a hindering effect on unity in narrative poetry. For the sense of unity is not *only* a final effect, a feeling that the work is finished according to the author's design. Rather it is that feeling confirmed and fed by evidence derived from looking back on the harmony and individual vitality of the component parts. Therefore any lack of harmony or proportion in the parts, any excess in episode, any confusion of incident, may hinder and impair that final sense of wholeness which we are here calling unity.

On the other hand, no narrative poet should be quite content if he fails to attain unity. There is (so to put it) a tendency to unity implied in the essential epic structure, as Aristotle in his *Poetics* very clearly shows. According to him, the essence of the epic lies in its having a beginning, a middle, and an end, in other words, in its being a perceptible whole. The narrative or epic poem must tell a story and have a plot; and, though it may tell several stories and have more than one plot, the poet who takes pains will naturally design it to tell and have only one, and so a standard of unity will be set up.

Much of course depends on the theme of the poem. It is possible to select a theme, especially for a heroic or epic poem, which is so large and vague as hardly to lend itself to story-telling or plot-making in the ordinary sense. In many cases the primary attraction of an epic lies in the traditional interest and importance of the character and adventures of the hero. When this is so, its chief merit may be felt to consist in the successive phases in which that character and those adventures are presented, and unity

may be hardly sought or missed. An epic about King Arthur, or Ulysses, or Æneas, may become famous, and give poetic satisfaction, merely as a string of poetic passages. It can hardly be said that even *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are conspicuous for unity. The unity of *Paradise Lost* is discoverable on inspection rather than apparent in reading; and *Paradise Regained* is—especially as an exposition of the title—a fragment.

It is different with narrative poems which do not possess epic character, poems like *The Lady of the Lake* or *The Giaour*. Such poems may be called, if we will, novels in verse; like novels, they depend largely on plot and construction, which, as we shall see, is for novels a chief expression of unity. And, while fascinating metre and beautiful lines and passages will do much to redeem a narrative poem without a coherent and well-told story (just as many good features may redeem a novel in the like case), it is plain that the narrative poet ought, as far as possible, to pre-conceive his poem (*i.e.* his story) in its beginning, middle, and end before he begins to write.

2. *Dramatic Poetry*.—Unity is much less optional in dramatic than in narrative poetry; indeed we must say that it is part of the essential nature of drama. The typical or ideal dramatic poem is the play as exhibited on the stage; and a play on the stage not only ought to interest us by its plot, but its plot ought to give us a sense of *perfection*, *i.e.* of proportion, arrangement, finish, inevitableness. Plot, as Aristotle taught, is the chief thing in drama. It is so because of the actuality which is simulated on the stage; because, in dramatic poetry, make-believe is constant and complete; we are interested in the behaviour of characters who act and suffer and influence each other

(*i.e.* the actors pretend that they do so) before our eyes. Everything in drama depends on events and circumstances on which character acts and which react on character; and such action and reaction are the material of plot. And, inasmuch as a play is meant to be completed in a representation of physically endurable length, the action must reach a natural and final close before the interest of the spectators is released. Except in very rare and abnormal cases, we expect a play to be performable in not more than three hours. These facts show the great difference between dramatic poetry and narrative, as to the latter of which the reader is wholly in the narrator's hands, and at the mercy of his expositions and comments.

Yet a wide study of plays shows us that even in dramatic poetry, where unity is urgently called for, it is often ideal rather than actual. It was most frequently realised in the Greek drama, where the vital importance of plot was always present to the dramatist's mind, where emotion was carefully and consistently restrained by art, and where formality of structure was rigid and obligatory. Yet even among Greek plays the unity of *Ædipus Tyrannus* was exceptional; and Euripides, himself only a younger contemporary of Æschylus and Sophocles, enriched the drama by breaking away from the Sophoclean formality into a looser coherence. Later history further illustrates the point. The famous doctrine of the Three Unities, adumbrated by Aristotle, became a commonplace of dramatic criticism. The French tragedy writers of the seventeenth century, Corneille and Racine, unvaryingly conformed to the rule that a play must confine its action to one day; that the action must be carried through in one place; and must be embodied in one story. But while

this remained the formal ideal on which French and English writers insisted, the practice of the English drama refused to be bound by it. The English drama shot rapidly into strength from roots which were native or at least modern rather than classical; and it very soon embodied itself distinctively in the work of Shakespeare. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century Shakespeare's lack of form was severely blamed by no less a critic and man of letters than Voltaire; and if we study Shakespeare's plays, and the plays of his most famous dramatic contemporaries and successors, we shall find, not only that there is nothing in them analogous to the formality of Sophocles or Racine, but that few of them are describable as great wholes or unities. In some there are underplots, or other kinds of multiple arrangement; in some there are great gaps in time; in some the action seems unduly hurried, in others unduly retarded, while the scene shifts from place to place. If we consider Shakespeare only, we have to recognise that, *e.g.*, *Othello* gives much more sense of unity than *Lear* or *Hamlet*; and that *Cymbeline* gives no sense of unity at all.

How then are we to regard this inconsistency? If unity is as vital to dramatic poetry as it evidently is, are we, for the comparative want of it in him, to place Shakespeare below Racine, and the English drama much below the Greek? How does Shakespeare make up for such deficiency, if deficiency it really is? The questions must be carefully considered.

In the first place, we must not dazzle our eyes, as the old critics did, by the doctrine of the Unities. The unity which is the ideal of the drama may be secured otherwise. It may be secured, *e.g.*, by singleness of plot, by prominence of the central character or characters, or by clearness and

intensity of motive. Halting as is the construction of *King Lear*, and burdened as it is by a distinct double plot, we feel it, especially on the stage, as a unity rather than a duality partly because of the tremendous prominence of Lear himself, and the appalling climax of his sufferings; partly because the motive of the play—breach of filial duty—is clear and intense enough to bind the two plots together. In *Hamlet*, the motive is somewhat dubious (this is only another way of saying that nobody seems yet to have finally read the riddle of Hamlet's character), but the prominence and interest of that character give the play its unity.

Again, such is the richness and various merit of the Shakespearean drama, that its comparative weakness in unity is amply compensated for. It is one of the great achievements of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets to have invented plays which are great wholes in spite of transcending, and apparently defying, formal unity. *Cymbeline*, though it has three practically detached plots, and a singular formlessness of outline, is yet one of Shakespeare's finest plays, by virtue mainly of the beauty of its heroine, and also of many of its situations and episodes, and of its poetry throughout. It is by character, situation, and beauty and power in detail, triumphing over mere unity of formal structure, whether in tragedy or poetic comedy, that Shakespeare is what he is to the world.

3. *Lyrical Poetry*.—Unity is conspicuously actualised in lyrical poetry. Whenever we speak of lyrical poetry we must remind ourselves of what it is, of the great variety of poems which may be included in it, and of the extreme difficulty of defining it. Through all the variety, two qualities seem fairly constant, singly or together—*brevity*

and *songfulness*. The brief lyric ("Home they brought her warrior dead") werecognise as typical; about brevity, therefore, there is no difficulty. But the quality I call "songfulness" is harder to realise and discuss. It is, of course, present in "Home they brought"; when we call that musical we mean partly that a musician might set it with more or less ease; partly, and still more, that it compels a quasi-musical recitation as we read it or recall it. But if not equally typical, equally within the denotation of lyrical poetry are long poems, poems as long as the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, or *Christabel*. Have they songfulness? If so, in what sense?

As to the Wellington Ode, it partakes of the nature of all odes, *i.e.* balanced formality of structure combined with much irregularity of metre and rhythm. This combined formal balance and metrical irregularity make it musical in a sense in which narrative poems and a large number of plays are not. In other words, sense of form is one of the essential features of the enjoyment of a musical composition; and therefore we may, if we will, call the formality of an ode songfulness, in the sense of musicality.

Christabel is, of course, narrative as well as lyrical; and we may, if we like, deal with it only on its narrative side. But, however much we try to do so, its lyrical character will force itself on us as predominant. As we read it and recite it, the story, and the way in which the story is told, seem to us as nothing, and we yield ourselves wholly to the melodic and metrical charm. We do not, perhaps, expect or desire to have *Christabel* set to music, but we think of it as already and in itself musical.

One or two other features of lyrical poetry suggest themselves from our present point of view. A lyrical poem

generally, or at least often, expresses a single strong personal emotion, a phase of pure egoism. Again, it often expresses a definite situation, fraught with strong emotion. How are those features of lyrical poetry related to unity?

The brevity of the typical lyric, as we have seen, evidently favours unity. If a song is not to clothe itself in narrative and become a ballad, but to complete itself in a very few verses, it must give to the hearer that sense of wholeness which is unity. In a short lyric of high excellence, in fact, brevity and unity are one.

The same holds good with the lyrics of strong single personal emotion and strong emotion-fraught situation. They are single, and in their singleness lies their unity or wholeness, their perfection. We are obliged to think of the poet as preconceiving them clearly in their entirety.

But how of the musicality of the long lyrical poem? Here everything depends upon whether the poem is an ode or a lyrical drama, or whether it is a combination of lyric and narrative. If it is a poem like *Lycidas* or *Prometheus Unbound*, it has the quasi-musical formality which is one of the expressions of unity. If it is a poem like *The Ancient Mariner* or *Christabel*, the obligation of unity is made weaker. It is important in such cases to consider whether the poem is in stanzas or continuous. The more obtrusive formality of the stanza-structure favours unity as all formality of structure does: one expects the series of verses to be not too long, and to lead up to something. In the continuous lyrical narrative we may almost lose the ideal of unity altogether. But unless the lyrical character itself disappears, the fascination and melody of the rhythm can hardly fail to serve as a tendency to unity.

No literary form, we may well feel, instructs us as to

unity in general so impressively as the lyrical poem. We can get great and high pleasure from parts of an ill-constructed or incoherent play or narrative poem, and still more from an ill-constructed or incoherent novel or history or treatise; but a pleasure-giving sonnet or song at once incoherent and admirable is inconceivable.

II. We pass on to consider unity in prose.

Prose is so different from poetry that we can hardly expect it necessarily to conform to a rule which may bind poetry; and we have seen how, even in much poetry, unity is an unrealised ideal, or an added grace. Again, prose is utilitarian or altruistic rather than egoistic; and the artistic instinct which produces unity is often a phase of egoism, like the instinct which begets a statue or a symphony. A writer mainly bent on influencing or benefiting his readers is very likely to be content with presenting his work in a series of instalments, and to dispense with conceiving and expressing it as a whole. Yet more, the consideration of length, which we have seen sometimes operating against unity in poetry, operates with still more effect in prose. To no prose form (except, perhaps, the novel and some efforts of the journalist) is unity so essential as it is to the sonnet and the short song. The length to which prose works naturally extend makes it very difficult so to construct them as to leave a sense of unity with the reader.

It is to be remembered also that the author's preconception of his work as a unity to be wrought out seems inconsistent with that evolutionary character which belongs to so many prose works, in which the end cannot be seen from the beginning, nor the inferences anticipated which may

follow from the premises. Many books become an unpremeditated journey for author and reader alike. It is a well-known fact that authors sometimes write only to define their own cloudy ideas, and it turns out that they also delight or move the world. Such work is not preconceived. The expression is spontaneous; and spontaneity seems to exclude preconception of wholes.

There are striking differences among prose literatures as to unity. The French have very much more instinct for it than the English. An English prose work is as a rule put together in a much more haphazard fashion than a French one of the same kind; only exceptionally is it *exacted* (to understand the word etymologically) and finished *ad unguem*.

Thus, if we take our illustrations from English literature only (as in this book we try to do), we are forced to look on unity in prose as an ideal seldom realised, which may be unattained with more or less impunity. All evidently turns on the more or less of the impunity; and therefore we ought in every case to consider unity with reference to the particular form we are criticising at the time; and to the intrinsic demand for wholeness made by that form.

Let us go through our list of forms, taking them in the order of the urgency of this intrinsic demand.

1. Apparently we ought to begin with the novel; for prose fiction makes something of the same kind of demand for wholeness as the poetic drama. Like the drama the novel depends greatly on plot and, like the drama, it is a work of invention, in which the artist constructs what we ought to insist shall be a cosmos within definite limits.

But there are certain obvious differences, which may have important results.

For one thing, the writer of a novel, which is not autobiographical or epistolary, generally plays the part of a commentator distinct from any of the characters, who marshals them, describes the situation and the scenery in which they act or suffer, and may at any time interrupt the action so as to write prose-poetry or essay-like passages or chapters.

Again, a novel may be, and constantly is, an evolution in a sense impossible to a play. A novelist, as we know, often sits down to write a novel with no scheme at all before him or in his mind; perhaps only with a firm imaginative grasp of one character, or of one or two characters, or, it may be, only of a locality or a period. From a dramatic point of view he does not see the end from the beginning; and his plot (for he must of course have a plot) is little more than a series of incidents invented to bring out the features of his characters or give human interest to his scenery or period. Such construction is too loose for the most loosely constructed play.

We have seen that the English drama has to a large extent transcended the obligation of strict formal unity, and relies for its primary interest on character, atmosphere, single situations, and beauty or power of expression throughout. So, and much more so, does the novel. When we speak (as we constantly do) of novels of incident, novels of character, novels of sentiment, novels of plot, philosophical novels, or what not, we hardly attribute to them such unity as is to be found, *e.g.*, in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*. We think of the mystery and infinity of life, and of the developed novel as reflecting it; and, if

the novel seems to us partial or fragmentary or chaotic, we are disposed to blame life rather than the artist. Instead of the supreme grace of wholeness in the artistic product, we content ourselves with the unity of impression made by the leading characteristic of the novel, whether plot, incident, character, sentiment, or what not.

Yet (as the existence of, *e.g.*, *The House of the Seven Gables* reminds us, and as, we may add, the best French novels remind us) unity is in fiction an ideal, a supreme grace and merit. Can we, by reflecting on the nature of the novel, arrive at any clear idea of what it is and how it may be attained?

We shall probably succeed best by considering how *The House of the Seven Gables* gives us a sense of unity. But, before doing so, let us think of three leading features of many, if not of all, novels.

(1) There is *motive*. The motive (in this sense) of a novel is its leading or underlying theme; as we say that the motive of Charles Reade's *Hard Cash* is the abuses of lunatic asylums in his day, meaning that they are the principal or underlying theme of the book, and that the book seems to have been written in order to expose them. But has every novel a motive? Or (to put another question to much the same effect) has *Tom Jones* or *David Copperfield* a motive? It is evident, of course, that if it has, it is much fainter and less definite than that of *Hard Cash* or even of *Hard Times*, which (we are warranted in saying loosely) was written to expose the assumed inhumanity of early Victorian commercialism. Or, again, what shall we say of *Guy Mannering*?

It is only through his own self-revelation that we can learn what an author's motive was in writing or designing

a novel; but the motive of the novel itself, in the sense of its chief or underlying theme, we can detect for ourselves by ordinary critical inspection. When we do so inspect, we are driven to conclude that every novel which is not a mere brief record of incident has a motive. The most doubtful case is that of an extended record of incident, such as R. L. Stevenson's *Kidnapped* or Stevenson and Osbourne's *The Wrecker*. Stevenson was to a large extent a reviver and restorer of that pure story-telling for amusement which is one of the chief historical sources of prose fiction; and for the success of such story-telling little is needed besides a sequence of interesting or exciting incidents. Much of Stevenson's work, e.g., *The Master of Ballantrae*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Weir of Hermiston*, is very strong in motive; but it is undoubtedly difficult to find a main or underlying theme in *Kidnapped* or *The Wrecker*, or anything but amusing adventures, drawing of character, charm of style. These are extreme and exceptional cases. But what of *Tom Jones* and *David Copperfield*?

In these, and in all novels which resemble them in scope, the motive is certainly faint and indefinite. Yet we feel at once that wide as is their scope, and full as they are of mere delightful incident, they have more of a principal or underlying theme than, e.g., *The Wrecker*. They deal, broadly and genially, with the doings or adventures of human beings on the assumption of their intrinsic interest; unlike such novels as *Hard Cash*, they have no assertive predominant theme in terms of which we characterise and remember them. Yet, on the other hand, they are unlike *The Wrecker* and kindred stories of adventure, for one thing, in dispensing with the marvellous as a source of effect. And this is a fundamental difference. A sequence

of adventures, if it is to succeed when it is produced, and to survive as a classic, must, it would seem, be a sequence of exciting, or (as the word is often used) "romantic" adventures. If the element of romance (in this sense) is wanting—as it is, on the whole, in both *Tom Jones* and *David Copperfield*—we shall find that in novels without what is often called "a purpose," novels dealing broadly and genially with human life, there is a faintly visible central interest of a somewhat definite kind. We find that the novelist is not only telling a story to amuse us, but is more or less consciously and deliberately expounding average humanity in concrete fictitious instances. In *Tom Jones* Fielding is constantly letting us know that his hero is a careful portrait of an ordinary young man, free from the glosses of idealism and pessimism, acting on, and being acted on by, the ordinary play of forces to which life exposes him. It is much the same in Thackeray's *Pendennis* and *Philip*—not to mention *The Newcomes*. It is much the same in *David Copperfield*, though here the motive is fainter and less definite. Dickens had not the artistic self-consciousness of Fielding and Thackeray; also he was an idealist, and never set himself, as they did, to portray the average man without glosses. Hence, in most of his novels, he has a strong quasi-didactic motive, e.g., workhouses in *Oliver Twist*, Yorkshire schools in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Chancery-procedure in *Bleak House*. In *David Copperfield* no such motive is present; in reading it we seem to be merely looking at a series of delightful pictures of life and character. On close inspection, however, we find that we are really doing more. We find that the hero has something of the character and functions of Fielding's and Thackeray's heroes; that he is to some extent

an autobiographical portrait; and that though, beside Tom Jones or even Arthur Pendennis, he may seem pale and lustreless, he is, as they are, the average man, realised by the author as such, behaving in such and such a manner in the stream and eddies of life. The author is not a mere tale-teller; he has a theory, however faintly and sub-consciously formulated, of masculine human nature, and he writes in order to expound it. The more thoroughly we examine novels of which the motive is as faint as it is in *Copperfield*, the more likely are we to find that the motive is *the portrayal of the average man*.

The mention of *Guy Mannering* reminds us that there may be more than one motive in a novel of the highest class. In his novels of Scottish life Scott was largely utilitarian, and in all his novels it was natural to his genius to make the motive clear and strong. In *Guy Mannering* there are several strong and unmistakable motives. There is first of all the motive from which historically the book took its rise, but which soon dies out—astrology. Then there is gipsy-life in south-western Scotland. Yet again, there is smuggling in the same district; there is Liddesdale farming-life in Dandie Dinmont; and finally, there are Edinburgh life and manners in the mid-eighteenth century. When we think of *Guy Mannering* and wish to explain its power to ourselves, we think of these things blended together; and we feel sure that Scott, in writing the book, deliberately tried and did his best, however rapidly, to expound all these matters for the pleasure and profit of the reader. In other words, he wrote in order to expound them; they were his *motives*.

(2) There is *plot*. Plot is to be regarded as the group or series of selected incidents by which the motive works

itself out. In one sense, plot is essential to every story; *i.e.*, there must be in every story a logic, a rational scheme (however preternatural the incidents may be), and that logic is plot. But, while plot is always present, it may vary greatly in prominence and strength. Sometimes (*e.g.*, in Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone*) it is so prominent as to be identical with the motive. We read the *Moonstone* only for its plot; when we think of it, we think only of the plot; and we feel as if the author had himself thought only of the plot. Sometimes (*e.g.*, in *The Newcomes*) the plot of the entire work is subordinate and hidden; we can find it if we look for it; but we hardly think of it as we read, and when we call up the novel in memory we remember, probably, nothing about the plot; the totality (if we have any sense of totality) lies for us in other things—in the character studies, perhaps, and especially the character of Colonel Newcome; or, it may be, in the atmosphere or the style. Sometimes, again, plot (like motive) is multiple. We cannot justifiably say that *David Copperfield* or *Middlemarch* has a single plot, or that the unity of either consists in plot. Each novel has really materials for several novels; it is a group of plots linked together with more or less skill. In *Middlemarch* motive and plot may be said to be identical, and both are multiple. There are a Casaubon-Dorothea motive and plot; a Rosamond-Lydgate motive and plot; a Garth-Vincy motive and plot; a Bulstrode-Raffles motive and plot; and if we find unity in *Middlemarch* at all, it is only inasmuch as it is (as the sub-title proclaims) “a study of provincial life.”

In the case of *Guy Mannering* (where there are, as we have found, several marked motives) there is only one plot, *i.e.*, there is an attempt (which we may regard as

successful or unsuccessful, ingenious or only fantastic) to work out the different motives through one central story, viz., the kidnapping (as foretold in the astrologer's vision), subsequent adventures, and restoration of Harry Bertram. The plot is obvious enough and prominent enough to be of great importance to our reading and re-reading of the book. Yet, such is the superiority of the multiplicity of motives to the single plot, that they abide with us to the exclusion of the plot. We think of one or more or all of them when we think of the unity of the book; the plot we may with impunity forget.

In addition to its general meaning of plot as the tissue of incidents through which the characters are conducted, and the purpose or motive of the book is worked out, the word has a special meaning, about which a word ought to be said. We often—perhaps usually in ordinary speech—think of a plot as containing the elements of secrecy or concealment and surprise, and as being good or bad according to the skill with which the secret is kept and at last revealed. Such obviously is the skill of the *Moonstone*, and, as we shall find, of all novels which depend much on plot for their total effect. In the development of the novel, and especially in its most recent development, this element has gradually lost its importance, and has come to be mainly associated with that species of novel commonly known as “sensational.”

(3) Lastly, there is *atmosphere*. This is, of course, a metaphorical word, and, compared with motive and plot, it is vague. But what we call atmosphere is vague rather because it is important than because it is unimportant. It is vague, and we have to speak of it metaphorically, because it is very pervasive, and many things go to con-

stitute it. By the atmosphere of a novel, indeed, we mean hardly less than its totality or unity; we mean the unity of impression which the reading of the book gives us and the recollection of it recalls, a unity which is felt in every part and which can with difficulty be analysed. But though we may not be able to analyse it, or show how the harmony which it bespeaks is composed, we can, I think, say one thing about it. We can say that it has some connection either with locality or with period. When we speak of the atmosphere of *Shirley*, we mean (more than anything else) the impression of Yorkshire scenery and people which the book gives us; when we speak of the atmosphere of *Esmond*, we mean the age of Queen Anne. When local or temporal colouring of this kind is absent from any particular book, we shall find it difficult to speak of the book's atmosphere. We may speak of the atmosphere of Jane Austen's novels; but in that case we shall mean something rather different from the atmosphere of *Shirley* or *Esmond*. We shall mean only that in all her books Jane Austen wrote, and wrote genuinely, about her contemporaries. We should not think of speaking of the atmosphere of *Pride and Prejudice* or of *Mansfield Park*, because neither of these has any scenic background worth mentioning, hardly more than the parlour or the shrubbery, or what lies between the country house and the county town.

If this be so, if the metaphorical atmosphere is so important, and so dependent on scenery on the one hand, and on costume and manners on the other, we seem justified in setting a high value on what we may have regarded as mere adjuncts to fiction. It would seem in fact as if the metaphorical atmosphere of a novel was in many respects equal in importance to the real physical atmosphere—necessary,

if not to life, at all events, to colour and chiaroscuro, the charm of light, and the changing mystery of haze and cloud. Without it, we can hardly help feeling that the life of fiction has too hard and crude an outline, and that its figures are too staring and detached.

When we speak of *The House of the Seven Gables* as a salient instance of unity, we mean that it is remarkable for motive, plot, and atmosphere, and that the three qualities are blended in a unity. We can distinguish the motive and the plot; we feel that the plot (which is not without the conventional secret in the discovery of a hidden document) works out the motive with singleness and without any superfluity; and that so vivid and true is the colouring, both local and temporal, that every chapter and word contributes towards an impression which we can only vaguely indicate by saying that it is like the tone of a landscape, or a diffused perfume.

What is the motive? Hawthorne himself tells us; but we shall find it difficult to agree with him, at least wholly. The motive, he tells us, is ethical, viz., the visitation of the sins of ancestors on their descendants. But when we read and recall the book we have, I think, only a very faint ethical impression; and we cannot help feeling that however much the author may have started with strong ethical ideas his art carried him away from them into milder and more æsthetic regions. We feel, I think, when we neglect Hawthorne's preface and only cross-examine our own impressions, that the real motive of the book is exactly what the title indicates, a particular house in a New England town. Unconsciously (it may have been) to himself, the author began with an image of this house in his mind and imagination, first as a material building with special

architectural features, then as the *locus* of a certain human group. Two tendencies were always active in Hawthorne—the tendency to trace the consequences of evil, and the tendency to emphasise by preternatural suggestion. Therefore *The House of the Seven Gables* must witness crime and retribution; and there must hang round it some kind of ghostly suggestiveness. So much for the motive as it appears to the reader: it is the house and its inhabitants.

The motive realises itself completely through the plot. The house itself is brought before us vividly as a structure in the first chapters, and we are told the story of its building and early history, with the grim incident of Maule's hanging and the grim legend of Maule's well. Then we are made acquainted with the Pyncheon group, first the dead ancestors, then the living representatives, as deriving both their consequence and their misfortunes from the wrong they had done to the original founder of the house. The curse is in the very fibre of the house and in the garden with the enchanted well; and, as the story is one of reparation and expiation, the house must be forsaken by the family, and their peace restored elsewhere. The original curse, embodied in the changing of the waters of Maule's well in the garden, must be deprived of its power by the betrothal on its brink of the young girl Pyncheon to the sole remaining descendant of the wronged Maule. But the essential Pyncheon wickedness must first be embodied in the sanctimonious judge, who impoverishes his cousin Hephzibah and still more grievously wrongs her brother Clifford, and who suffers the predicted retribution of a sudden blood-stained death. By these events, and many episodical ones, the house is given a real spiritual interest and significance.

And this is done less by the power of the incidents which

make up the plot than by the depth and consistency of the atmosphere reflected in that subdued consistency of expression which we know as "Hawthorne's style." The incidents happen, and the characters are shown, in a sad, grey, sombre, and rather sickly light, which we associate throughout with the building itself—its gables and gloomy chambers and quaint casements; its beautiful but ill-omened garden, its elm by the street front. Nor are the colouring and the light and shade purely local, the atmosphere is charged also with that psychology of Puritanism which is so much to the New England novelist, that awful sternness of temper, which may be the agent indifferently of right or wrong, of holy or criminal impulse.

The result then of our examination of this particular novel seems to be that the feeling of unity which we have in reading and recalling it is that of a clear consistent atmosphere in which a definite and striking motive is worked out through the sequence of perfectly fitting incidents. And the result of our general examination of unity in novels seems to be that, at all events in English fiction, it is a supreme and added grace rather than a normal feature; that when it is present in exceptional perfection, it is a unity of motive, plot, and atmosphere; that, in more average instances, it is the result of skill in plot; but that the sense of it may be given also by the strength of other elements, *e.g.*, consistency of atmosphere, vividness of character, individuality of style, or what not.

Ought the novelist to be satisfied without giving a sense of unity to his reader? Surely we must answer that he ought not. For, though life may seem a mere weltering infinite, the novelist cannot escape the artist's responsibility and obligation; he is active and not passive, not a

mirror but a creator; he makes a world, and he ought to make it a cosmos. A mere sequence of adventures, a mere succession of scenes is but childish and elementary fiction, and cannot yield the highest work. What Shakespeare and his contemporaries did for the English drama befell the English novel, early in its history; it transcended mere sequence of adventure on the one hand, and mere rigid formality of plot on the other, and made itself the free exponent of human experience in general. But, even so, it remained a work of art, a "bounded field," a "garden enclosed," in which ideally a unity of some kind must be attained and shown.

2. Next to the novel in urgency of intrinsic demand for unity are biography and history, which in this book we place in the same class.

About biography there is little to be said, and therefore we may quickly dismiss it. It starts with the ready-made unity of the life to be written, and no biographer except a sheer bungler should fail to reflect that unity in his work. Of course the unity or wholeness of individual lives greatly varies. Some characters seem fragments, or a mere congeries of fragments; some environments seem chaos. But, in spite of all, the individuality is there, one and indivisible; it is the biographer's absolute duty to find it; and, if it is imperceptible, the subject does not deserve a biography.

The difficulties connected with history are much greater. As we have abundantly seen, history is very various and very hard to define. If we abstain from theorising about it, and judge of its subject-matter merely from the majority of historical works, we shall be apt to think of it as singularly wanting in unity in itself. We have, it will be remembered, come to the conclusion that the true or ideal theme

of history is man in political society, *i.e.*, the State: but we have to admit that many actual historical works of the highest rank and fame seem to have been written on some other assumption. We should be treating actual historical masterpieces quite unfairly if we were to approach them with a definite notion of the State, in which the State appears almost personified and individualised, and to condemn them for failing so to realise it in their books. We must evidently take each book on its own merits; try to find out how its author conceived his theme; and judge whether he conceived it, and succeeded in presenting it, as a whole.

There is another difficulty. However definitely we may conceive of the State as the sole proper theme of history, it is plain that it is a theme of very great complexity. The State itself is an abstraction; before we can deal with it historically, we must embody it in a large number of concrete institutions, personify it in a large number of individuals; and trace its fortunes through all kinds of events. The historian may hardly even mention the word "State"; he writes of this king and that assembly, of debates and intrigues and battles, of statistics and morals and religion, of art, it may be, and literature—of everything, in short, which may contribute, not too remotely, to a political result. No self-denying ordinance he may pass, no firmness of conviction that history is "science" rather than "literature," will do away with the complexity of the historian's theme.

Nor is this all. The historian must not only deal with a very complex theme which inevitably ramifies in all directions, but he must write narrative, he must present (*i.e.*, the most famous historians have presented) the products of his investigation chronologically, as if (to some extent)

the occurrences of the past were happening before the reader's eyes in the present. For however closely he may confine himself to the State as his theme, he is not making a treatise on political science; he is dealing with some one State in particular, and showing how, and by what sequence of steps in time, such and such modifications of the State came to pass. And he cannot do this so as to attract and interest the reader without a mastery of the difficult art of narrative.

How, then, confronted with such difficulties, is the historian to attain to unity? Narrative and the sequence in time which necessitates it, provide him with his first great practical difficulty. How is he to arrange his work? Shall he mark his divisions by mere chronological *termini*, or shall he divide according to the logic of his theme or period? Or shall he not divide at all, but proceed annalistically, trusting to the orderliness of his instincts to keep him from digressions and irrelevance, and to his sense of proportion not to falsify the contours of his theme, to underestimate the peaks or dwell too long in the plains?

It is evident that if chronology has the greatest bulk in his regard, it will be almost impossible for the historian to attain to unity at all, for time is never completed, and its beginning no man knows. If I write the History of England from the landing of Hengist and Horsa to the present year, whatever is to be thought of my start, it is evident that I must break off at a purely casual point, and so my work must be a fragment and not a whole. And something of the same difficulty besets all obtrusively chronological treatment. History is a study of causes and consequences, causes stretching back to an indefinite past; consequences reaching forward toward a boundless future.

And so it cannot but be a hard task for the historian, at all events legitimately and truthfully, to make his theme in any case seem complete.

There is another way in which chronology may hamper unity. Historical works (*e.g.*, Froude's *History of England*, Freeman's *Norman Conquest*) often contract or expand as they proceed; their scale alters, and it may be that the historian's conception of his theme also alters. The work may thus end in being a kind of patchwork, a farrago of thoughts and afterthoughts.

In view of all these difficulties we ask again, How is the attainment of unity possible in historical composition?

It would seem that it becomes possible only by the artistic instinct of the historian, which may enable him to isolate his theme so as to give it a relative completeness. Through a false conscientiousness the historian is very likely to misconceive his proper attitude towards his theme, and to consider himself bound to be a mere passive chronicler of events. A chronicle produced by such a writer (and many such of course have been made) would not be a literary work worth the notice of the student of Style. Every historical masterpiece which could be adduced evidently owes its merit to the fact that the author has not been passive, but active and creative, that he has entered on his work with certain preconceptions, and that he has conceived his theme according to the constitution of his own mind. His work, therefore, instead of being a photographic or mechanical transcript and reproduction of the past, is (if it is to possess true literary rank) a creation or invention, in which the power which we call imagination has a large share; and his problem is so to create, and so to use imagination, as not to falsify the truth of things.

Now, if the historian may and must so deal with his material, he may, if he is enough an artist to do so, conceive his theme as a complete whole, and present it to the reader as such. Let us suppose him writing a history of the so-called "Great Rebellion" in England. Whether his sympathies are with the Parliament or the King, he will transcend mere chronological limits and conceive his theme as sharply defined—on the one hand, say, by the conditions of Charles I.'s Personal Government, and, on the other, by the Restoration. He will lay stress on each limit; he will deliberately shut off what is outside, and will show the great national movement as a drama evolving from a real beginning to a real end. He will find in it a pervasive individuality of character; he will think of it as a new birth, with only a limited time to live. It was thus that, *e.g.*, Carlyle conceived the French Revolution. Behind it lay a vast train of antecedents, before it an endless train of consequences. But *itself* was as definite as a sudden meteor in the heavens—"the thing we specifically call French Revolution," which was blown into space by Napoleon's grape-shot. True, it is a relative—if we will, an artificial—completeness. But it was real enough to Carlyle, and is real enough to his readers, to make his book a manifest whole. The legitimacy of such isolation, its effect on the truthful realisation of the past, is another question—a "scientific" question, we may say (borrowing the loose popular parlance), rather than a "literary" one.

Unity and artistic isolation such as Carlyle gave to his historical themes are rare, and hardly within the reach of ordinary writers. But there are other subsidiary means by which the impression of wholeness or unity may be given.

There is, *e.g.*, the unifying influence of *country* (in which

word is included whatever corporate unity may be the historian's theme, whether a country proper, a city, a league, or what not). Every such theme has a unity which stands out to the historian's imagination as he dwells on it, and which, if he has adequate skill, he may impress on his readers. If it is his own country he is writing about, the imaginative sense of unity will take the familiar form of patriotism; he may so image and personify his theme as to make his work a kind of biography, and his only difficulty will be with his chronological *termini*. But, if he is worthy to be an historian, he will feel a kind of patriotism about any country, city, or league whose fortunes he may be tracing.

Again, there is historical *biography*, e.g., Carlyle's *Frederick the Great*, or Seeley's *Life of Stein*. A book on a great historical personage, a book on Cæsar or Napoleon, may purport to be a biography, but it is inevitably a history, a history of the Roman State in Cæsar's time, of the politics of France or Europe in Napoleon's. But the writer, who might find the politics of Rome or Europe bewilderingly complex as a theme, simplifies, or seems to simplify, his task by making them crystallise (so to speak) round the life of a great statesman, which gives the theme unity and at all events a semblance of completeness.

Yet again, there is the virtue of *arrangement*, which is not such a homely one as it at first sight appears. We have already said something about arrangement; and here it is necessary to say only that all arrangement is the expression of an effort after unity, and that the more complete and radical is the arrangement, the more vivid is the sense of unity. Even though an historian may fail to image his theme in anything approaching to a complete isolation, he may

by sheer force of cosmic instinct so arrange its divisions and subdivisions as to make his work an approximate unity.

So far the nature of the case. What about the practice of the chief historians?

In one sense, the earliest English historians were annalists or chroniclers, such as Stowe. But, inasmuch as their work fell short of literary rank, we must seek for the beginnings of English history elsewhere, in such masterpieces of historical biography as Bacon's *Henry VII.*, or Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*. Such important works of the seventeenth century as Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion* and Burnet's *History of my own Time*, were too contemporaneous, and relied too much on the all-sufficiency of contemporary interest and party feeling to be works of art impressing by unity. Our earliest works of historical art in this sense are the eighteenth-century histories of Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, the first English historians to work on the distant past in (so to say) cold blood. By all three unity is evidently aimed at, and more or less successfully attained. It is most successfully attained by Gibbon, who, of the three, was the most deliberate literary artist. The whole which Gibbon conceived and which he makes us feel as we read him, was indeed a somewhat artificial one, but it was very real and definite to him. His work suggested itself to him one evening among the ruins of the Capitol, and he thought of it always as a history of ruins, first the ruin of the Roman city and then that of the Roman Empire. Long as the work is, and complex as is its theme, Gibbon never allows us to forget that we are watching a process of decay and death, which is consummated in three events, the establishment of Islam at Constantinople; the temporal Italian power of the papacy; and the "barbarian" rule in Western

Europe—the whole being symbolised, as the final chapter shows us, in the ruin of the city of Rome, to which—his first inspiration—he thus returns at the close.

A survey of the great work done in history in the nineteenth century seems to show a kind of struggle between the annalistic method pursued, *e.g.*, by S. R. Gardiner in his work on seventeenth-century England, and the unity of conception exemplified in very different ways in Carlyle's *French Revolution* and Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England*. The works of Macaulay and Froude may be said to be on the border line. Macaulay's work is accidentally a fragment, and, in its original conception, it was intended to be brought down to—at the earliest—the end of the eighteenth century. In other words it was to be a chronological history, of which the unity was to consist in the prosperity of Great Britain brought about by the Revolution of 1688. As it stands, however, the unity of the work consists in that Revolution itself, its causes and its immediate consequences in the reign of William III. Froude's history is much in the same case. Its chronological limits were altered as the work proceeded: essentially it is an historical defence of sixteenth-century Protestantism in Britain. Any unity it has is the unity of the Reformation. Recent work has been increasingly non-annalistic and therefore more favourable to unity. The change has been to some extent coincident with a tendency to regard history as "science" rather than "literature," and to depreciate narrative skill. Whether narrative ought to be thus depreciated we cannot discuss here; in this book we regard it as an essential part of the historian's expressional or stylistic ideal. At this point it is enough to recognise that the more historical works are constructed as expositions of

definite isolated and complete phases of social life, the more they partake of the character of that which we have distinguished as the *treatise*, the form to which we now turn.

3. About the treatise there is little to be said here additional to what has been said in a former chapter. Its distinctive method is exposition, *i.e.*, the demarcation for the benefit of the reader of what the writer has previously conceived as a whole. Thus unity would seem to be of the essence of the treatise. For, in one important sense, science is arrangement, and the completeness or fulfilment of arrangement is unity.

4. As to religion and philosophy we encounter difficulties. Both have, as we have seen, as great leading themes—God (or the universe) and humanity. Of these the former is the only absolute whole; while the latter is one of the greatest relative wholes. For reasons which need not be restated, we may leave religion alone here and speak of philosophy only. No philosopher quite deserves the name who, if he does not especially write about the universe, at all events shows in his work that the idea of it is constantly present. On the other hand, most systems of philosophy are instalments, and each instalment can have only a relative wholeness.

In Great Britain, as we have seen, the sense of the ultimate and universal has been comparatively faint among philosophers; and, as a literary consequence, their philosophical works have differed in no essential respect from scientific treatises. Bishop Berkeley is our most literary philosopher; and his writings, as we might expect, are the most interesting from our present point of view. His *Essay toward a new Theory of Vision* and his *Principles of Human Knowledge* are quasi-scientific treatises. But in his *Alci-*

phron, his *Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous* and his *Siris*, where we come closest to his central thought and method, we have works of literary art—all in dialogue form—which are the purest philosophy, and may well be tried by canons of unity.

An interesting question presents itself in connexion with these philosophical masterpieces of Berkeley. We ask: Is there any relationship between their evident and undeniable wholeness and the writer's philosophy? Or is it a mere result of his natural lucidity of style?

The answer, surely, must be that there is a close relationship between the philosophy and the style. Berkeley's effort, in all his thought and writing, is to get at an ultimate (*i.e.*, a universal) principle; he conceived himself, in other words, to have demonstrated Divine existence and activity as the source of all reality. This demonstration presented itself to him as simplification and unification, as a single solution which removed many false issues, and disposed of many false explanations. And if we read carefully his writing and dialogue, we cannot, I think, avoid the impression that the unification to which Berkeley felt he had attained in thought was reflected in the completeness of his efforts in writing. Each composition is a whole because it represents the whole which is the world.

5. It remains to consider the essay and the prose of journalism.

Within the very wide limits which in this book we attribute to the essay, it is not altogether easy to realise the relevancy of unity.¹ In originally defining the essay proper, we have found in it two chief distinctive qualities:—

¹ I leave out here the kind of essay which is either a short treatise or a short critical biography.

singleness of theme and "desultoriness and incalculability of treatment." Of these two characteristics the one would seem to balance the other. For if singleness of theme tends to produce artistic wholeness in composition, will not desultoriness and incalculability of method tend to prevent it?

Also we have seen that the essay is as favourable to egoism as most other forms of prose are to utilitarianism—that in this respect, in fact, the essayist is nearly allied to the poet. As regards unity, however, he is evidently in very different case from the poet. Poetic rhythm and metre, as we have seen, while they put no restraint on the poet's self-expression and self-relief, impose on it definite and rigid expressional forms, and those forms encourage unity in the sense of wholeness. But the definiteness and rigidity of prosody is precisely what is wanting to the essayist. The essay is essentially formless. The essayist may say what he likes how he likes, provided he contrives to be interesting, and provided he keeps clear of rhythm in the sense in which that word is used in poetry.

In the criticism of the essay the question of length is of great importance. In dealing with this form we have had to speak of "the essay proper," and of "essay-like compositions," and we have had to take as models products as dissimilar as one of Addison's papers in the *Spectator* and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. In the short essay unity can be secured by the singleness of the theme, and any desultoriness which leads away from the theme is to be regarded as a serious stylistic error.

In such essay-like compositions as *The Anatomy of Melancholy* or *Sartor Resartus* it is impossible to apply such rigid standards of unity. As regards the first, it is evident

that "Melancholy" is an abstraction, which one may define (within limits) according to one's fancy, and illustrate with a corresponding licence. Yet, in spite of this, Burton's book is notoriously systematic, and is indeed presented in the form of a systematic treatise. Within that form, however, its method is essentially whimsical and rambling, and so it remains a true essay, realising itself much less by the rigidity of its arrangement than by the incalculableness of its contents.

As regards *Sartor Resartus* our conclusion must be much the same. Carlyle's mind was constitutionally most systematic and orderly; and accordingly we find an orderly framework in the shape of biographical and editorial fiction. But the real unity is given to each chapter by its singleness of theme. The book, as a whole, must be called desultory. Formally, the best efforts of the journalist are short essays, and one of their chief merits must be brevity. The object of journalism is to produce an immediate effect in relation to some definite issue; and the definiteness of issue will ensure the brevity of the composition.

To sum up. Unity, whether in verse or prose, is an artistic grace of varying practicability and relative obligation. In poetry its presence is often secured by the necessities of prosody. In prose (except in very short compositions), and especially in English prose, it is a rare and exquisite grace, which, like some infrequent flower, occasionally appears to attest organic perfectness. But, inasmuch as its absence nearly always argues some structural imperfection, every writer should do all that effort can do to attain it. In other words, no author should be content not to be an artist.

CHAPTER X

FASHION

HITHERTO we have been considering Style almost wholly unhistorically. In other words, we have regarded the optional element in expression as presenting similar problems to all English writers in all ages, to Chaucer as to Tennyson, to the twentieth-century journalist as to the translators of the Bible. In so doing we have been guided by an important principle. The chief problems of expression, those which most urgently engage the student of Style, are evidently timeless. If, for the moment, we once more sum up the obligations of prose as logic and lucidity, and the obligations of poetry as beauty and power, we shall feel at once that, with certain deductions, these are the same in all periods. What Spenser meant by beauty is for the most part what Keats meant by it. Power is power whether in Ford or Crabbe; the lucidity of Hooker is homogeneous with the lucidity of Newman. Indeed, the classic rank, the immortality (as we call it) of literary masterpieces, rests fundamentally on the timelessness of Style. Plato and Dante and Chaucer and Shakespeare interest generation after generation afresh, not because of national peculiarities or obsolete characteristics, but because the expression of thought and feeling transcends all such things, and, like thought and feeling themselves, is for ever one and unchangeable.

Yet there is another, though a subordinate, aspect of the matter. It is quite clear that there is an historical element in Style, and that no treatment of Style could be adequate which was wholly unhistorical. We cannot say that expression is timeless without such qualifying phrases as "for the most part," "in the most important respects," or what not. There is obvious fashion in Style as there is in costume; and not only does it affect expression, but it is a separable source of attraction or repulsion to readers. We may like or dislike a writer, not because of the presence or absence of such eternal features as logic or lucidity, beauty or power, but because the writing is "old-fashioned" on the one hand, or "up to date" on the other. Therefore the student can by no means neglect fashion; and a chapter on fashion there must be in this book.

When we fix our attention on the subject, we increasingly realise both its importance and its difficulty.

It is important and difficult to isolate what we mean by fashion so as to consider it by itself. It is always possible that features of expression may seem strange, not because they are old-fashioned, but merely because they are distinguished; and the reader may think them strange merely because he is not familiar with distinguished styles.

" Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange," ¹

is distinguished, but not old-fashioned; it might be the natural expression of any poet in the present day gifted enough to use it. "O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none have dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world

¹ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act I. Sc. 2.

hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched quarters, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet!*"¹ This is prose so distinguished that we may well call it prose-poetry, and prose-poetry of the first class. But it is not really old-fashioned; any twentieth-century preacher or other orator desiring to apostrophise death, might without artificiality apostrophise it in the same or almost the same words.

On the other hand:—

"Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life;"²

and this prose:—"Fruit-trees displayed on the southern wall, outer staircases, various places of entrance, a combination of roofs and chimneys of different ages, united to render the front, not indeed beautiful or grand, but intricate, perplexed, or, to use Mr. Price's appropriate phrase, picturesque;"³ are in different ways and for various reasons, old-fashioned: no poet or prose writer would now write thus except in conscious imitation or parody.

If we read a leading article in to-day's *Times* and, immediately after, a *Times* leader or paragraph of 1815 or even of 1845, we are certain to find expressional features in the earlier compositions, not necessarily either good or bad, which are not present in the contemporary one, and which are evidently part of a style not timeless, but in temporary vogue, longer or shorter as the case may be. A very little inspection shows that such literary fashion

¹ Sir W. Raleigh, *History of the World*.

² *Hamlet*, Act III. Sc. 1.

³ Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*, Chap. 32.

cannot be considered in terms of mere chronology. Peacock is a much less old-fashioned writer than Scott, though most of his novels were contemporaneous with the Waverleys. Fielding is a much less old-fashioned writer than Scott, though he died long before Scott was born. Dickens is not an old-fashioned writer, though his style occasionally shows old-fashioned features; and, in respect of general expression, *Pickwick*, his earliest work of large dimensions, shows those features seldomer than some of his other works.

How, then, are we to distinguish the timeless from the temporary in expression, the old-fashioned from the merely strange or distinguished? That is our first problem in this chapter. Is it only a matter of inexplicable instinct, or can we find any canons or rules to guide us? Some rules soon suggest themselves.

We examine carefully the tissue of the piece under consideration, so as to see, if possible, whether it is really archaic or not. What guides us in our search?

1. We try it by the test of *usage*. We find out wherein the apparent archaism consists, whether in words, sentences, or what not, and we consider whether such strange expression is or is not in any kind of present-day use. The lines

" Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,"

we pronounce archaic or old-fashioned simply because the two words "fardels" and "grunt" have passed out of usage; the former wholly, the latter in that connexion; and both are so prominent as to characterise the phrase. In the lines:—

" Nothing of him that doth fade," etc.,

no word is unusual in poetry except the compound word

“sea-change,” and that is unusual merely by its novelty, by its being a combination made by Shakespeare in the *Tempest*, with analogous instances in the same play. The passage from Raleigh, though no word or phrase in it can be said to have passed out of usage in prose or prose-poetry, is here and there on the borders of the archaic. In such an apostrophe, written at the present time, the writer would put “those whom all the world hath flattered” instead of the relative alone; and it is doubtful whether, in a passage so deliberately artistic, he would use so etymologically simple a phrase as “drawn together all the far-stretched greatness.” In the passage from Scott, the archaism of usage is very marked, and pervades the whole tissue of the composition. No present-day writer would in such a passage speak of fruit-trees as “displayed” on a wall. He would probably write “openings” or “entrances” instead of “places of entrance.” He would write “roofs and chimneys” instead of “a combination of roofs and chimneys.” He would write “made” instead of “united to render.” Above all, the elaborate periphrasis which makes the final climax of Scott’s sentence would be impossible to him. The literary interest of the clause is great, because it *is* so old-fashioned, because it dates the infancy of the word “picturesque,” at the present time as common and as clear in meaning as “beautiful” or “grand.” A present-day writer would say the front was picturesque: to distinguish picturesqueness from beauty and grandeur would be childish; to elucidate it by such analytic words as “intricacy” or “perplexity” would be unnecessary. Yet in the whole passage there is no obsolete word like “fardels,” no obsolete usage like “grunt” as expressing weariness or pain.

2. We apply the test of *conventionality*.

All conventionality in literary expression will become old-fashioned. In so far as the difficult word "natural" is used in antithesis to conventional, we may lay it down that all timeless style is natural. As we have found so often already, there are two ideals of fitness always in conflict in literature, the fitness prescribed by the nature of things in all periods and languages, and the fitness prescribed by some temporary or local notion of dignity. Where the latter ideal rules, there will inevitably be much expression destined to become archaic.

Conventionality explains much of the archaism of the passage from Scott. The long words, the carefully explanatory periphrasis, are the result of effort (probably quite unconscious) to avoid colloquialism in descriptive prose, as being below its dignity. The same conventional, temporary, and obsolete ideal of dignity led Scott so often to write "female" for woman, "domestic" for servant, "apartment" for room, "ocean" for sea.

3. We apply the test of *date*. When a passage seems strange and not only distinguished, we inquire whether something presupposed by it may have been novel when it was written and be old now when we read it. Here again the Scott extract helps us.

We see that it is written with timorousness, and indicates inexperience in writer or reader, neither of which belongs to our own time. Scott is writing of a very ordinary object, the front of an antique building; but he writes of it with the elaborate care with which one describes or explains something novel and important, lest the explanation should be insufficient, or the description misleading. We look again, and when we find the climax of the sentence intro-

ducing with much ceremony the word *picturesque* and actually giving one of its origins, we seem to have a key to the style of the whole passage. We look out "picturesque" in the dictionary, and we find that it was an eighteenth-century importation from the French, used sparingly, and with some uncertainty of application, before Scott's time. We find that by Price, the writer to whom Scott refers, it was carefully distinguished from the sublime and the beautiful in 1794, when Scott was twenty-three, and twenty-four years before the *Heart of Midlothian* was published. Then we remember that though Pope used the word picturesque, it was, in the sense which now it bears, a product of what we call Romanticism, and that Scott himself was one of the Romantic writers who disengaged and defined it most decisively for us. He was a great restorer of the cult of the wild, the irregular, the ruinous, the "Gothic," but in 1818 the cult was still somewhat novel; walls with outer staircases, and "intricate" and "perplexed" frontages were not yet the describer's stock-in-trade. And Scott writes of these carefully and recommends them almost apologetically. So much of its archaism the style of the passage owes to prevalent taste.

Take another illustration. Let us go to a purely eighteenth-century writer untouched by the Romantic Revival, and see how Fielding deals with the "picturesque." He is describing the view from Mr. Allworthy's house in Somersetshire: "In the midst of the grove was a fine lawn, sloping down towards the house, near the summit of which rose a plentiful spring, gushing out of a rock covered with firs, and forming a constant cascade of about thirty feet, not carried down a regular flight of steps, but tumbling in a natural fall over the broken and mossy stones, till it came

to the bottom of the rocks; there running off in a pebbly channel, that with many lesser falls winded along, till it fell into a lake at the foot of the hill, about a quarter of a mile below the house on the south side, and which was seen from every room in the front. Out of this lake, which filled the centre of a beautiful plain, embellished with groups of beeches and elms, and fed with sheep, issued a river, that for several miles, was seen to meander through an amazing variety of meadows and woods, till it emptied itself into the sea; with a large arm of which, and an island beyond it, the prospect was closed.”¹

It is pretty evident that Fielding in the passage under consideration is painting, less from the love of landscape in general, than from the wish to describe, with as perfect accuracy as he can command, one particular place with which he was familiar in his early days. And the formality and explicitness of the description almost provoke a smile.

Fielding, I have said, is not nearly so old-fashioned a writer as Scott. He is not addicted to description; his strength lies in his “criticism of life”; he is of humour all compact, and humour is one of the secrets of the timeless in style. The descriptive piece we have just read is exceptional in Fielding, and it is old-fashioned. It is old-fashioned because of its coldness, its definiteness, and its explicitness, qualities prevalent in landscape description at the date of *Tom Jones* and lingering in prose throughout Scott’s life, but obsolete now. Romanticism, insisting on warm feeling, mystery, and suggestiveness in the rendering of nature, prescribed a standard which, *mutatis mutandis*, is still that of descriptive prose.

4. We recur to the all-important and ever-recurring idea

¹ *Tom Jones*, Book I. Chap. 4.

of *fitness*. We realise, indeed, that, fundamentally, it is fitness which distinguishes between the temporary and the permanent in taste; between the agreeably and disagreeably archaic; between the rare or distinguished and the old-fashioned. We realise, also, that each kind of writing has its own fitness; that there is a fitness of poetry (including fitness of epic drama, etc.) and a fitness of prose (including all the different kinds of prose). Into these fitnesses we must inquire in what remains of this chapter. But, first, we must make two general observations, by way of introduction.

(1) *Fitness may overpower Archaism.*—This is another way of saying what we have already said, that what is rare or distinguished in expression is not necessarily old-fashioned. But it is a much more inward and fundamental way of making the statement. For we cannot say it intelligently without having in our minds the great idea of the timeless or eternal in expression—the idea which embodies the real greatness of literature. The real greatness of literature, that which makes it a fine art, a worthy object of careful study, and an ever fresh source of profit and delight, is its power, in defiance of time and fluctuations in taste, to express in the permanently best way, the thought and feeling of the eternal spirit of Man.

(2) *The Standards of Fitness in many respects vary from age to age.*—Taking literature as a whole, we may perhaps say that these changing standards chiefly concern *religion, modesty, humour, and learning*. All civilised literatures in all ages admit the dignity of those four things; and all four have a timeless and unchanging significance. Yet, as to religion, modesty, and learning, some ages are much more reserved than others. Some ages write explicitly and

copiously, others suggestively and guardedly, about religion. What is too immodest for legitimate expression in one period may not be so in another. A display of learning may be a matter of course, and delightful in one period, and pedantic and irksome in another. And while humour is in its essence eternal, and not only as fresh in Aristophanes and Chaucer as in Sterne and Dickens, but evidently homogeneous throughout, it is also true that the jests and sallies of one period often fail to amuse the reader of another.

Keeping those two principles in mind, let us make some inquiry into the question of taste in relation to fitness, as it concerns the chief kinds of poetry and prose.

I. *Poetry*.—About poetry as a whole we are soon able to affirm that there is much less fashion, in the true and widest sense of the word, here than in prose. Poetry, we feel, to a much greater extent than prose, is able to attain to timelessness in expression. How is this?

It seems to arise naturally from the essential nature of poetry, as distinguished from prose. However widely and comprehensively we conceive poetry (and we ought to conceive it as widely and comprehensively as possible), we find it in the last resort straitly defined by metre. Again, we know that it is characterised by egoism in a sense and to an extent much beyond the egoism of prose. Yet once more, we know that its aims, more constantly and much more exclusively than the aims of any kind of prose, are the pursuit and reproduction of beauty and power. All those characteristics of poetry seem to make for timelessness in expression.

Metre predisposes to timelessness. For it puts all poetic expression into a world of its own, a different world from that colloquial world in which prose style takes its rise,

Much prose is but the fixation of the strongest and most vivid parts of ordinary speech; and ordinary speech is evidently much affected by fashion. But as soon as speech is metricised—as soon, *i.e.*, as it is formalised according to schemes of prosody—it is no longer ordinary speech at all, and is much exempted from the fashions of ordinary speech. The metrical rules to which it is subjected are necessarily limited in number and valid in all ages; and this helps to make the phraseology, if not the vocabulary, of poetry valid for all time. Metre stereotypes fitness and makes the archaic familiar.

It is, of course, unnecessary to remind the reader that metre cannot thus secure absolute timelessness of expression. For even if the phraseology is timeless, old-fashioned words will give an old-fashioned air to the poetry in which they occur. But, on the other hand, the student will easily convince himself that it is in phraseology rather than vocabulary that the timelessness of poetry consists.

The characteristic egoism of poetry favours timelessness and perpetual fitness of style. It is the expression of the poet's whole self, less as an individual than as a kind of epitome or microcosm of humanity. In the greatest poetry, whether lyrical or non-lyrical, in Homer and Dante and Shakespeare, as much as in George Herbert or Shelley, the poet is uttering the best, the deepest, the noblest, human thought and feeling; and it is the depth and height, the extension and intensity of the thought and feeling, rather than its individuality, which makes it the mainspring of poetry. If we examine such poetry as expresses the widest and deepest thought and emotion, we shall find that it is the most timeless, the least old-fashioned, in phraseology. If it were not so, the greatest literature of the world would

be a cabinet of curiosities, and not, as it is, a fountain of living waters.

The characteristic devotion of poetry to beauty and power helps to secure it against merely temporary fashions of style. As we have already seen, beauty and power are, for the most part, timeless, and that fact tends to make the expression of them timeless also. If it were not so, if their influence in poetry were only the doubtful and changing charm of the archaic, or if they had to make themselves felt through antiquated expression, they would not be the beauty and power which we know.

Now let us ask how taste affects fitness in the chief kinds of poetry.

(1) *Narrative and Epic*.—Narrative (including epic) is the least egoistic form of poetry; it is that form in which metre is least assertive; and it is that form in which it is least easy to maintain continuously a high level of beauty or power. We might therefore expect more that is archaic in narrative than in other kinds of poetry. Criticism of epic in English is immediately confronted with *Paradise Lost*, of which, owing to the superb artistic power of the poet, the workmanship is extraordinarily equal. There is very little that is old-fashioned in the phraseology of *Paradise Lost*. Yet in respect of the criteria which we distinguished earlier in the chapter, in respect of religion, modesty, and learning, we do find some archaism in the style of *Paradise Lost*. It is a matter of common criticism that Milton, in his representation of the Persons and mysteries of the Godhead, is more explicit, more definite, more human and intellectual than we nowadays think fitting, or should nowadays dare to be. In respect of modesty also, his taste in, *e.g.*, some parts of his descrip-

tions of the life of Adam and Eve in Paradise, allows him to be more explicit than perhaps modern taste would allow a poet to be. Above all, there is throughout *Paradise Lost* a display of learning, quite in accord with the poetic taste of the seventeenth century, but to which not even Milton's consummate literary skill and all but infallible artistic instinct can wholly reconcile us.

At the opposite pole from *Paradise Lost* stands another notable seventeenth-century epic, the *Davideis* of Cowley. Here, as Dr. Johnson has pointed out, Cowley's merits—whatever in others of his poems they may be—are missing. If we read the poem itself, we shall hardly fail to agree with Johnson's criticism of it; and we shall see that that criticism, written at only a century's distance from the poem, turns mainly upon temporary and variable standards of fitness. Our taste in many matters is not that of the eighteenth century, not that of Dr. Johnson; yet his criticism of the details of the *Davideis* appeals to us at once. Johnson makes us feel, by what he quotes and by his comments on it, that Cowley (by no means, of course, an incompetent writer either in verse or prose) had an obsolete taste in the expression of religious ideas, in a pedantic display of learning, and in literary situations where humour, as we think of it, would have guided him.

Of ordinary narrative poetry (as distinguished from epic) it has to be noted that much of it is in a sense old-fashioned, simply as such. Now that the art of prose fiction is so generally practised, it is in prose rather than in verse that narratives are written. We are apt to regard narrative poetry, except at moments of special "inspiration" (*i.e.*, the conspicuous attainment of beauty and power), as tedious, and the taste which it was composed to meet as

old-fashioned. This is partly the reason why we no longer admire the poetry of Byron and Scott as much as our forefathers did, and why we never read Southey, in whose verse his most gifted contemporaries took so much pleasure. We expect, and, in the main, we rightly expect—poetry to maintain a higher level of excellence than is possible to narrative, with its ups and downs, its inevitable plodding, its frequent pauses that the poet may undo hard knots of fact, or of fiction conceived as fact. Even Crabbe, whose vivid realism keeps him immortal, strikes us as old-fashioned. We are, indeed, inclined to regard most narrative poetry as old-fashioned, unless it is (1) in short poems; (2) directly imitative, especially of classical models; (3) arrestingly beautiful or humorous; (4) made powerful by dramatic management of incident.

(2) *Drama*.—In dramatic poetry there is much room for the temporary (and therefore, at periods, archaic) as well as the timeless in expression. The drama “holds up the mirror” (to use Shakespeare’s words) not only “to Nature” but to fashion; and it must needs, therefore, at times be old-fashioned. And this is true, not only of comedy (which in the main belongs to prose), but of tragedy and the serious drama generally. It must to some extent reflect phases of character which have a temporary interest, whether contemporary or archaic, as well as the timeless or eternal aspects of human nature, thought and emotion.

Serious dramatic poetry is often old-fashioned through *rhetoric*. All the characteristics of rhetoric are snares in the path of drama; and nothing is more apt to be old-fashioned than rhetoric. Indeed we may almost say that its most distinguishing feature is its lack of the quality of timelessness which is to be found in the greatest dramatic

poetry. Passion; that intense individuality of conviction which we call originality; sincerity; sense of the truest beauty, command of the highest power; when these are present in drama, there is little danger of rhetoric, and little likelihood that the style will be old-fashioned. But when these high qualities are absent or feeble, and the poet feels that he must keep the credit of his verse up to a high conventional standard, rhetoric will be his only resource, and much of it, he may be sure, will stale with time.

(3) *Lyrical Poetry*.—We have found that everything which most distinguishes poetry from prose is most intense and most evident in lyric. It is not wonderful, therefore, that timelessness of expression, which characterises all poetry, more than prose, should characterise lyric more than other forms of poetry.

Lyric comes, at its best, from the deepest depths of human nature, fed by many springs; and such profound humanity of origin secures for it an expressional significance unchanging from age to age.

Let us think, for example, of the power and charm of the ballad. The ballad is a narrative poem in lyrical form; and in its construction the narrative and the lyrical are so closely and deftly blended, that it often seems difficult to distinguish the interest of the narrative from the æsthetic delight of the lyric. The vocabulary of ballads is often very old-fashioned. As narratives they are often slight, childish, rambling, gratuitously preternatural, and they are always archaic. Yet their interest is perennial and their effect is always fresh. When we look closely we can see that it is because of their lyrical form that ballads are not old-fashioned, that they seem to come so straight

from the universal heart and to reach it so easily. Of course much of the phraseology as well as the vocabulary of ballads is archaic and in dialect; and part of the pleasure we get from them is derived from these qualities. But our chief and deepest pleasure comes from other qualities, from pathos, tragedy, and rapid movement, qualities which are of perennial force and freshness, and which depend, for their force and freshness, on the power of lyric, with its brevity, its inevitableness, its metrical and rhythmical charm, its unrivalled power of avoiding circumlocution and false standards of dignity.

The same impression is made by the study of such a collection of lyrical poems as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. The *Golden Treasury* series is of course a selection, and a selection made by an excellent critic; but it is a very large and comprehensive selection, and yet style that is really old-fashioned hardly presents itself. There is hardly any archaism at all on a level with the archaism of the passage quoted above from the *Heart of Midlothian*, hardly more than archaism of words or short phrases. Every reader must feel the perennial freshness of style in Shakespeare's sonnets so copiously represented in the *Golden Treasury*. And what is true of them is, with little exception, true of all the lyrics to be found in the book.

(4) *Poetry of Disquisition and Argument*.—The gulf between this kind of poetry and lyric is very wide; and nothing makes the width of the gulf more evident than their respective relations to fashion. If it is but rarely that one finds true archaism in lyrical poetry, one constantly finds it in that large class of poetry generally called "didactic." Nor is this in any way remarkable. If first-rate lyrical poetry is quintessential poetry, disquisitory and argu-

mentative poetry may be called poetry in diffusion or dilution. In other words (to drop metaphor), we find it a little difficult to claim this kind of verse as a whole for poetry, except by virtue of metre, the one constant formal feature of poetry. In popular phrase, didactic poetry is apt to be *prosaic*.

If in this kind of verse the dividing-line is faint between poetry and prose, we cannot wonder that it should share but scantily in poetry's immunity from archaism. In so far it is apt to be prosaic it will be apt to become archaic. And, indeed, there is a stronger reason for the frequent archaism of disquisitory and argumentative poetry. Like drama, "didactic" poetry reflects much of passing thought and feeling; like narrative poetry, it has, as a whole, passed out of fashion. Men have come to prefer to write disquisition and argument, as they prefer to write narrative, in prose.

What features of "didactic" poetry, let us ask, are the most likely to survive, and to be indifferent to changes of fashion? Those, we may be sure, which are most poetic; and didactic verse, as we found, is poetry chiefly when it shows high power, or is a striking revelation of egoism—in one word, when it is most intense. All argumentative and disquisitory poetry is out of fashion; but at its best, as we find it, *e.g.*, in Dryden and Pope, there is little that is obsolete in its taste or phraseology. Even the phraseology of Cowper and Churchill at their best might be used without much apparent eccentricity by any one in the present day eccentric enough to write such poetry at all. It is otherwise with such verse as that of Blair and Akenside, or as Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*. When we call such verse prosaic we virtually call it old-fashioned as well.

5. *Poetry of Nature*.—This kind of poetry is much subject to the influence of fashion and changes of taste. To begin with, as we have seen, taste and opinion have varied much as to the suitability of external nature and animal life as themes for poetry at all. Again, when their suitability has been admitted, taste and opinion have varied as to the ways in which they ought to be treated in poetry. Even when poets have treated nature with love and insight, they have often regarded it as a mere background or setting for human interest. Nature may be treated in many ways; and each treatment may be much modified by variable taste.

Sincerity is a criterion which may help us here. Sincerity in the treatment of external nature means natural as opposed to conventional treatment; it means treatment based on a genuine love of the objects treated of, as distinguished from a mere conventional admiration of them. It also means treatment based on first-hand knowledge; the poet, if he is to make perennially fresh poetry, about nature, must write (in the famous phrase) "with his eye on the object." If he is thus sincere, if he never refers to nature without knowing and loving her, the poet's style is not likely to get much out of date. For to all who love poetry the phenomena of nature are themselves so perennially fresh that the poetry which deals with them, provided it is sincere, cannot fail to share their freshness. Sincerity affects and benefits all forms of nature-poetry alike, the realistic, the idealistic, the philosophic; it is good whether nature is treated for its own sake, or only as background to the human.

Another criterion is absence of rhetoric. Nature may be both known and loved, and yet the poetry which renders

her may be so wanting in simplicity that it may appeal to one age only, and fail to reach the universal mind and heart in all ages.

What exactly is it that is here meant by simplicity? It is that quality of Style which makes the object clear to the hearer or reader, as clear as in reality it is. The object may be revealed to him for the first time, at all events in the imaginative truth for which poetry chiefly cares; but it must be *revealed*; it must not be presented as a difficult riddle. It may, of course, be so presented by true poets who treat nature with the perfect sincerity of love and knowledge; and the effect may be most interesting and charming. But it is always doubtful whether it will endure, at all events with more than a mere archaic charm.

When we inquire into the philosophy of this matter, we seem to find that *reverence* as well as sincerity is needed to make the style of nature-poetry timeless. Underlying all eccentric enigmatic nature-poetry there seems to be the assumption (the presupposition of rhetoric) that nature, in order to be worthy of poetic treatment, must be turned aside from her simplicity by the ingenuity of the poet. This seems to show a deficiency of that reverence which thinks of nature as something too objectively perfect to be modified by the subjectivity of the poet. Here the critic is on very difficult ground. Every idealistic nature-poet modifies natural phenomena by his subjectivity; yet, of course, irreverence is by no means a general feature of idealistic nature-poetry. Nay, where a philosophical nature-poet makes phenomena exhibit or illustrate a philosophy with which we do not agree, we may say that he takes liberties with nature, but they are not necessarily irreverent liberties. They are justly liable to the charge of

irreverence only when natural phenomena are made to lose their clearness by the mere exercise of ingenuity or wit. Only so can they be said to lose their simplicity.

That they have so lost it, nothing shows in a more trustworthy manner than archaism of style. Much both of the "metaphysical" and religious poetry of the seventeenth century touches the holy things of nature with the hand of ingenuity and wit, and the verse in which it is done—however much we may admire it—is old-fashioned. And when there is the same lack of simplicity in contemporary poetry, we are, I think, haunted by the assurance that to posterity it may seem less simple than it does to us, that it may seem stranger and give less pleasure.

6. *Poetry of Humanity*.—The poetry of which the theme is man, man the individual, or man in society, may, like poetry of nature, be very various; it may be expository or satirical; it may be realistic or idealistic; it may be selective or universal. Expository poetry of man, poetry such as, *e.g.*, much of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, is, as we have found, based on the assumption of man's dignity and worthiness of poetic treatment. Reverence, therefore, must be the fundamental characteristic of its style; reverence, and all that it implies. But reverence alone will not preserve it from vicissitudes of taste and fashion. There must also be intensity, such intensity as will keep the poetry at a continuously high level of beauty or power. When there is this intensity, and only then, will the expression be timeless. In default of intensity, there is sure to be didacticism, in the form of ethical comment too tame to be felt as poetry, except at special periods. It is this tame didacticism chiefly, or a lapse into undignified detail, which makes expository human poetry old-fashioned.

The two mainsprings of satiric poetry are scorn and indignation. Like the poetry we have just been considering, satiric poetry must have intensity if it is to have timelessness of style; its scorn or indignation must be at passion-heat, if it is to transport us into real sympathy, and not, at best, to interest us by its ingenuity. Again, if its interest is to be other than merely archaic, satiric poetry must treat of the deeper vices of human nature, which are perennial, and not of mere foibles or oddities which may pass with the fashions of an age.

What we determined as to the appropriate style for realistic poetry of humanity will, if we recur to it, show us how such poetry is affected by fashion. The chief qualities of the style in question we found to be sobriety and undulation, of which the second is the more vital. If realistic poetry of humanity is to be poetry indeed, its style must not only (like the style of all poetry) express beauty or power, but it must be perfectly genuine and sincere; it must abjure rhetoric; it must rise and fall with the rising and falling of the themes.

Now, when we feel such poetry old-fashioned, it is nearly always because the expression fails in undulation, from a false sense of dignity which makes it rhetorically level. A poetic style, of which we may say (to change the metaphor) that it is never in undress, may be quaint, but cannot express what is immortal in human fact.

The poetry of human idealism is all that we need further consider here. It is, as we know, a kind of poetry full of difficulty for the student of Style; because, for one thing, it involves so much power of modification and (as it is often called) "creation" in the poet. A poet with such powers and prerogative evidently has a great range of expression;

compared with the realistic poet, he may be said (in loose popular language) to move in a world of ideas rather than of facts; in anything he may say or sing about human beings you will find it hard to arrest him by exhibiting the standard of mere actuality. It is a significant illustration of this that two of the greatest idealistic poems of humanity in the English language, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, are not about human beings at all, but about preternatural beings. Their deepest interest and significance are human, *i.e.* they deal with virtues and vices, deeds, aspirations, hopes, which are meaningless apart from human nature; but, in order that those objects may be dealt with poetically, they are worked out by the agency of beings whom the poet deliberately places beyond natural bounds.

Poetry with so much licence as this, seems almost to transcend taste and fashion, and to have timelessness of expression secured to it. And, if we are to take Spenser and Shelley as types of the makers of such poetry, we shall find much to confirm our belief that it is thus transcendent. In the *Faerie Queene*, indeed, there is a good deal that is frankly old-fashioned. There is a vocabulary, a large part of which was archaic even in Spenser's own time. There is a somewhat different standard of modesty from that of the present day, or, at all events, of recent times. There is an occasional display of irrelevant learning which is wearisome to us. But, in what may be called the vital parts of the poem, there is, apart from the vocabulary, a striking freshness and perennial fitness in the style. And this, we feel, is a direct result of the idealism of the poems. Idealism in poetry, indeed, may itself become unfashionable, though hardly, perhaps, for long, when it is so beautifully presented

as it is by Spenser and Shelley. But, granted the attraction of idealism, the expression of it is little likely to savour of the merely temporary and fugitive in taste. The fact that it is idealism, that the poetry is poetry of the *ought to be*, confers upon it (if it is good and successful poetry) the likelihood of immortality—an immortality of expression as well as of feeling and thought. For the greatest ideals are those on which all men agree.

II. *Prose*.—In passing from poetry to prose, we enter a region in which fashion counts for a great deal; in which it is very hard to attain timelessness of expression, in which changes in usage and taste are frequent, and in which the problem of fitness presents itself in many and difficult aspects. To deal adequately with the whole matter would evidently require not much less than a historical survey of every variety of prose style. All that can be attempted here is the discovery of a few guiding clues; and this may perhaps be done by a brief survey of prose classified under rather fewer heads than we have hitherto used. We may, for the purposes of this chapter, abstain from considering what elsewhere we have distinguished as philosophic, scientific, and historic prose; and pass in review only the following:—(1) expository prose (in whatever connexion it may occur); (2) narrative prose (in whatever connexion it may occur); (3) prose fiction; (4) the essay; (5) journalism. Can we, under these heads, discover any criteria of timelessness in expression?

(1) *Expository Prose*.—Exposition in the strict sense is to be found in every kind of prose, and especially in scientific prose. It is the art of the treatise; and, as such, it may be described as a modern art. It is, to a large extent, co-extensive with science in the modern sense of that word.

In this sense, too, it is a matter of arrangement of chapters, books, and the rest, rather than of phraseology and paragraphing; and thus it hardly comes within our present inquiry. Moreover, in so far as exposition is concerned with phraseology, the phraseology is conditioned by lucidity, to a greater extent, perhaps, than in any of the other kinds of prose which we have here brought together.

As it is with cartography, so it is with exposition; lucidity, clearness, is its be-all and end-all. Now lucidity, more than any other quality, gives a timelessness to style, which transcends all changes of fashion and taste. Lucidity, which is the most hardly won triumph of exposition, is its eternity.

(2) *Narrative Prose*.—Narrative prose, whether it occurs in history or in fiction or elsewhere, is in different case from expository. In expounding, the writer is demarcating and exhibiting boundaries of what he and his reader conceive as *fixed*; it may be a science, or a policy, or a character. In narrating, he is dealing with what is conceived of as *moving*, a sequence or progression of events.¹

Narrative is correlative with action; it is, strictly, a counterpart of past events, in which they present themselves as a sequence or succession of causes and effects. And not only does narrative always imply movement; but it very often implies such a collision of forces as obliges the writer to be dramatic—to use the power, *i.e.*, of retiring into the background, and letting events or personages act or speak for themselves.

¹ The student must, of course, always bear in mind that there is no complete incompatibility, no absolute division, between exposition and narrative, any more than there is between, *e.g.*, lyric and drama. The word *description*, which may be used of both exposition and narrative, shows already the connecting link between the two. Yet the large general difference is clear.

With such obligations, narrative style has a difficult and complex task. Like all prose style it must be before all things lucid, but it must be much besides.

Narrative requires a great deal of intellectual and emotional action on the part of the writer. As regards fiction this is obvious; but it is almost equally true as regards history or other narrative of fact. Looked at purely objectively (in so far as that is possible) mere events have little value for literature. To give them such value they need the operation on them of thinking subjects. This is especially true when they depend on human action, when they are events which make policy and determine history. The writer of narrative cannot, like the expounder, be content with clearness, he must be *convincing*. He has to show that one thing follows from another, and his success will depend very largely on the strength of his convictions, and his skill in commending them to others. What really happens in narrative is indicated when we say as we have said, that narrative, narrative proper, narrative at its best, is the counterpart of actual events. But it must be at best a make-believe counterpart. And the success of the make-believe, whether as entertainment or as truth, depends on the endowment of the narrator, on his power of imagining and representing his power of inward vision and of reflecting on what he sees.

Wherein, then, let us ask, may we expect to find the timeless or immortal element in narrative style? A style, by its nature so difficult and so complex, evidently gives opportunities for both the permanent and the transitory; can we find any rules to help us in allocating each?

(a) The highest merit of narrative in all ages must surely be its nearness to fact, and this as much in fiction as in

narrative of fact so called. In this respect there is really no difference between the two; a fancied duel, *e.g.*, if it is described in the best way, must conform to the possibilities and probabilities of actual duelling; in other words, it must itself be, to all intents and purposes, an actual duel. This nearness to fact may show itself as *realistic verisimilitude*. The writer's art may be such as to make the reader feel that the events imagined in fiction or described in history are actually happening under his eyes. Of such narrative Defoe's fictions are the type; and in no prose is the expression more timeless, more unaffected by fashion, than in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Journal of the Plague*. It is timeless because it expresses perfectly (within its range) that reality of life which is timeless.

(b) If the narrative is suffused with subjectivity, it may show its nearness to fact by *truth of theory*. We must grasp this idea carefully.

Of the truth of anything which cannot be verified by personal experience there is no ultimate test but that which we may call either inherent probability, universal reason, or common sense. In every case in which personal experience is wanting, every case in which we must use testimony, we begin to press beyond the mere testimony to the ultimate test. Every time that a distinguished narrative is read, we perhaps ask first whether it is supported by the existing evidence; and, if we read purely scientifically, we may ask no other question. But, if our reading is literary rather than scientific, mere fidelity to evidence does not satisfy us. We treat the writer not as a reporter or even as an interpreter of evidence, but as a virtual creator of the events he narrates, by making us feel them inherently probable, reasonable, and interesting,

as he narrates them. It is because this cannot be done mechanically, because it requires high gifts in the writer, that narrative is in most cases, as we say, suffused with subjectivity. That subjectivity can warrant itself only by satisfying universal reason and common sense. In the case of such realism as we find in Defoe, the appeal is to an obvious common sense; we can, without any trouble, verify (so to say) every part of the narrative as we go along. But what are we to do in cases where verification is not so easy, where the narrator is making his tacit appeal not so much to common sense as to theory or even to philosophy?

In that case (and it is the case under our present consideration) we shall estimate the truth of the narrative (and with its truth its literary value) by the truth of the implied theory, and the depth and universality (*i.e.*, universal validity) of the implied philosophy. If the theory is fantastic, or the philosophy shallow and partial, the literary rank of the narrative will be correspondingly low.

But, when we say that the rank will be low, we must not be taken to say more than we really mean. An interesting narrative of high literary rank may be based on a fantastic theory or a shallow philosophy; but its style will, in all likelihood, have a temporary or archaic charm, rather than a perennial freshness, and an assured immortality. The dubiousness of the theory, the partiality of the philosophy, will be present to writer and reader alike, making the writer rhetoricise or otherwise give singularity to his style, and the reader either like or dislike the style with violence. Our concern in this chapter, we must always remember, is only with the *permanent* in Style and its opposites; and it does not follow that what fails to be permanent, what is used at one period and not at another,

may not be full of attraction and charm—archaic attraction and charm—for other ages.

It is neither subjectivity nor individuality (the subject of our next and final inquiry) which makes narrative expression temporary, but only the comparative failure of the writer to satisfy the reader's standard of truth. In the case of very realistic narrative that failure will happen when verisimilitude falls short of perfect realism. In the case of narrative which is instinct with intellectual and emotional presuppositions, it will happen in various ways. It will happen, *e.g.*, in historical narrative when the historian has a partial and partisan theory of the events and it will manifest itself, probably, by rhetoric. Or, in the absence of a really profound philosophy, it will manifest itself in conventional reflection or innuendo. While philosophy is universal and eternal, conventions are essentially temporary.

(3) *Fiction*.—The novel, in its specific English forms from Richardson to the present day, is at once one of the latest births of art, and one of the most typical of its period. It is so complex, and includes so many qualities of prose composition, that it is very difficult for the student or the critic to provide himself with such an ideal standard as is essential to enable him to distinguish between the passing and permanent in its style. The novel stands for so many different things, that there are, in one sense, many standards. There are the novel of manners; the novel of incident; the novel of sentiment; the novel of character, and many more besides; and each of these may be said to have its standard.

But, while this is true, and must never be forgotten in the criticism of prose fiction, we find three ideals which apply to fiction in general; standards to which we may

expect all novels to conform if they are to have timeless and not temporary power.

(a) There is *lucidity*. The writer ought to make it clear to us what the *meaning* of the novel is, as a whole, and in each of its parts. It does not follow, of course, that the style must be explicit rather than suggestive; the novelist, like the poet, may make use of suggestion to a very large extent; but he ought to suggest something; and, if it is, *e.g.*, the infinite, it ought not to be only the infinitely dubious. Lucidity, in the ideal novel, ought to characterise all parts of it, the character-drawing, the landscape, the dialogue, the plot.

(b) There is *proportion*. The novelist may be allowed a very wide latitude of invention and construction; but he can hardly avoid the necessity of having a motive and a plot, a group of characters and incidents in action and reaction. And this necessity imposes on him the obligation of construction. His events and characters must receive a *just* treatment at his hands.

(c) There is *truth to life*. The novelist's latitude of invention and creation may include occasional indulgence in preternatural characters and situations; but, if he is to keep clear of what is only temporary and may become old-fashioned, he must regard himself as an exponent of *human* experience. And his idealisations of it must be vouched for by reality. Everything that is monstrous in character, or palpably impossible in situation, can have no place in the ideal novel of timeless quality.

The English novel, being, in its developed form, not much more than a century and a half old, is both favourably and unfavourably situated with regard to the problem of fashion. It is unfavourably situated because a century

and a half is, as it might seem, too short a time to admit of the display of many changes in taste, at least as compared with the duration of other forms of prose; too short a time to permit the formation of very permanent standards of style. On the other hand, the English novel, in spite of its short life, is a good subject for the study of fashion for two reasons. In the first place, there are wide differences in taste between the eighteenth century, in which it attained its most striking developments, and the present time. In the second place, it was the extraordinary good fortune of the English novel, on its first appearance, not to be planted as a seed, but presented as a rich fruit by men of great genius, who at the very outset supplied us with permanent standards of style in fiction.

The novel, then, even as its earliest masters presented it, is a great complex, involving motive, plot, characterisation, social comment, narrative, description, dialogue. How, we ask, does taste affect all these things? What, under these aspects, do we find to object to in the fiction of the past? In what respects should we be only too well pleased to be able to write now as past novelists have written?

(a) *Motive and Plot*.—Over motive fashion has little sway. Yet there may be found dominating it two great tendencies, not unconnected with fashion. The one tendency is towards an objective, the other towards a subjective motive. Some writers of fiction, *e.g.*, Smollett and R. L. Stevenson, are moved by the wish to write adventures and experiences for the sake of their general human interest. That I call an objective motive. Others, *e.g.*, Kingsley and Mr. Thomas Hardy, seem moved by the wish to illustrate and justify certain personal convictions, *e.g.*, the evil of English social arrangements in the mid-

Victorian age; the glory of English Protestantism in the Elizabethan age; the charm and pathos, and withal the purposelessness, of nature and human nature alike. That I call a subjective motive.

Now, one obviously cannot limit a novelist as to motive. There is nothing necessarily old-fashioned in the novel of adventure, or necessarily new-fangled and fugitive in the "novel with a purpose" or in the "problem-novel." Yet we do seem justified in stating one or two canons about motive from our point of view in this chapter.

One is that the greatest, *i.e.*, the most famous and apparently immortal, English novels are objective rather than subjective. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Jane Austen, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, have made very dissimilar novels, but all are, on the whole, objective. Dickens and Thackeray are more subjective than the others; but we are surely right in valuing Dickens most when he is not writing against abuses; and Thackeray when he is not illustrating his snob-philosophy. The distinguishably subjective novel, the novel with a purpose, the novel written to air a theory, or to state or solve a problem, is, on the whole, a product of the later nineteenth century and of our own day.

Another is that, among subjective novels, those are the least old-fashioned which are based on broad and strong and universal convictions and theories. If the novel is to have a purpose, it must be a purpose of universally admitted value; if it is to expound a theory it must be one without which humanity would fare badly. No mere passing fashion of thought, no mere crude or morbid philosophy, will avail to give eternal freshness to fiction.

Plot is more affected by fashion than motive. The

character of plots varies indefinitely; and some plots we at once feel to be old-fashioned. They are the plots of great elaboration; plots such as many, perhaps most, of those of Scott, Dickens, and Bulwer Lytton, which depend largely on surprise, mystery, and recognition. And when we think why that kind of plot seems to have lost its power over us, and of the plots which have for the most part taken its place, we conclude that it is because the old-fashioned plot is conventional; because human affairs quite exceptionally, if ever, are in reality arranged as that kind of plot postulates, and because the representations of life which are to interest us perennially cannot be based on exceedingly exceptional arrangement of incidents and events. We feel that the conventional plot of complication, mystery, and surprise belongs to a somewhat obsolete ideal of the novel as a thing of mere entertainment; while our ideal of it is that it should follow with its art the play of normal life and experience.

(b) *Characterisation*.—In its highest reaches, characterisation is timeless. For all the most vital features of human nature in spite of its variations, savage or civilised, are permanent and unchanging; and only great individual genius, which is the same in all ages, can understand and expound it. There is nothing antiquated in the character of Hamlet or Tom Jones; the figures in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* might *mutatis mutandis* form a real, not a histrionic, procession to-day. Some of the vocabulary apart, there is nothing archaic in the style in which these characters are presented.

But a good deal of characterisation falls short of the highest reaches. A novelist puts many figures on his canvas; and, however great his genius, is hardly likely to succeed

equally with all, or, at least, to treat all in the greatest way. Besides, many good novels belong to literature in which none of the characterisation is of the highest or timeless kind. Over such characterisation fashion has considerable influence. Where the essentials of a character are not shown, the novelist will be thrown back on the accidentals, and this is much the same as saying that his style will be temporary rather than timeless, will depend on the interest of fashion rather than on the eternal interest of humanity. The characters, in fact, will lack something of that essential reality which makes human interest eternal, and will depend for their interest on some kind of conventions in their nature temporary; on mere oddity of person, it may be, or on costume, or on agreement with fleeting standards of manners.

In prose fiction there are three ways in which character can be exhibited: in dialogue, in the author's descriptions and comments, and in actions from which character may be inferred. Differences of taste and fashion show themselves in different uses of those different methods. Our highest ideal of characterisation in novels (derived, probably, from the characterisation of the great dramatists) is exhibition in dialogue and action, and we are inclined to regard the novelist's writing about his characters as the device of an inferior artist. But, while this may be, on the whole, true, we must admit the right of the novelist to introduce, to describe, and to interpret his characters if he chooses to do so, and can do so, in the best way. If we ask what the best way is, we must, I think, make a twofold answer. We must say that the best way is, in the first place, the most sincere and intense way; and that deviation from that way or shortcoming in it, reduces the work from

the timeless towards the temporary. We must say, in the second place, that, unless the fiction is to be mere essay, if it is to be true novel, the author's analysis of his characters ought to be made plainly subordinate to their self-exhibition in speech and act. If it is not, we must surely regard it as indicating that the writer writes about his characters because it is easier to do so than to make them speak and act for themselves.

Now, if a novelist thus fails (relatively) in characterisation, the chances of the timelessness of his characters will depend (it would seem) on the permanent value of his writing as essay. How fashion affects the prose of the essay we will consider presently.

When dialogue as a revelation of character strikes us as old-fashioned, it does so probably, either because it offends against those canons of modesty or reverence which we would wish to be permanent, or (more frequently) because it is conventional, consisting of words put into the mouths of the characters in accordance merely with some fleeting standard of the fitting set up by the novelist, and not dictated by imaginative or dramatic sympathy with the character.

(c) *Social Comment*.—About this important feature of many novels there is, from our present point of view, little to be said. In its essential nature it is essayistic; and we are not here considering the essay. Also it has much analogy with that writing about characters which we have already considered; being, in fact, often mere collective characterisation.

Perhaps all that we need to say about it here and now is that, if it is to be immortal, it must deal, in the best essayistic style, with social matters which are really

important or picturesque, and not merely of passing interest at some particular time. And to this we ought to add that it must be strictly subordinate, in quantity and otherwise, to the main constituents of the novel—plot (in the true sense of the word) and character.

(d) *Narrative and Description* we may consider together. A good deal which must be said about narrative in fiction has been already said in our introductory remarks on narrative in general. We may begin by reminding ourselves of the conclusions we there reached. We found that narrative is dynamical and concerned with a moving sequence of events. We found that it cannot be successful without a powerful subjective element on the part of the writer and that its ideal success depends in every case on its truthfulness.

With this last conclusion, in particular, strong in our minds we must now pass to some more specific considerations about narrative and description in fiction.

Two origins are plain to be seen in the English novel: the character-study of, *e.g.*, Addison and Steele; and the long unbroken narrative of Bunyan and Defoe. The excellence of such narrative as Defoe's and much of Smollett's gave narrative an assured place in English fiction, and set up a standard for it. Yet, though Defoe through his sympathy and verisimilitude (especially in *Robinson Crusoe*) seems perennially fresh, his long narratives are so far old-fashioned, they so far reflect a bygone taste, that we should not now wish to write them, and that sometimes, perhaps, in reading them we find them dull. However much we may be disposed to enjoy such length of pure narrative, we feel that the novel, as we now recognise its ideal, demands drama, and not only the dramatic

in incident, but the self-revelation of character, and the collision of personalities. Where there is great length of narrative and much very explicit description, our ideal is disappointed and we complain of old-fashionedness. The truth is that in fiction we have learned to expect events to *happen*, rather than merely to be narrated. In historical narrative it is much the same; for, as we have seen, the ideal, immortal, historical narrative is a kind of counterpart of events. But in fiction it is more so. For historical events *had* a life of their own once, and if the historian cannot restore it, perhaps his readers can. In fiction there is not, at least in the same sense, such a past to fall back upon. If the events are to live and move, it is the novelist only who can make them do so.

The tendency to over-narrate or to narrate tamely, often goes with the tendency to describe very copiously.

Description in novels is two-fold: *i.e.*, it may be of persons or of places. Each of these kinds has its *rationale*, and that of the second is for us much the more important. The first we may dismiss with a word. It is essentially part of that characterisation by talking about one's character with which we have already dealt.

The second, description of places or of scenery, is connected with special and very important elements in the novel: namely, scenic background and local colour.

On the whole, as we are very often told, scenic background and local colour came into the English novel with what is called the "Romantic Revival." In other words, English novelists from Richardson to Mrs. Radcliffe shared the indifference to scenery of most eighteenth-century poets; while Mrs. Radcliffe, and still more (after a considerable interval) Walter Scott, gave to scenery an import-

ance in fiction which it has kept ever since. All the great dead nineteenth-century novelists, except Thackeray, have been great exponents of natural scenery and natural phenomena of all kinds; and the popularity of such fiction as that of Mr. Thomas Hardy and Mr. Robert Hichens shows that description of nature in itself has by no means become unfashionable or old-fashioned. Yet, as we have already seen in passing, it is affected by fashion. Let us now inquire how.

We shall perhaps most easily find out by considering what we mean by the "romantic" feeling for landscape. We mean a feeling of genuine disinterested admiration and love of it; a feeling, as strong in the novelist as the poet, that, whether it is treated realistically, idealistically, or philosophically, it is full of significance, of wonder, and delight. In other words, the Romantic feeling for nature is a feeling which grows out of first-hand knowledge and genuine appreciation of nature instead of second- or third-hand knowledge and merely conventional appreciation.

Description of scenery in fiction will be apt to seem old-fashioned chiefly if "romantic" feeling (as we have just tried to ascertain its character) is absent or suppressed. The feeling is absent not only when the description is untrue to fact, but when the poetic appreciation and admiration are wanting. Nature, we feel, had much better be let alone altogether, even in prose, if she is not felt as the poet feels her, and rendered (in all essentials) as the poet renders her. We shall not admit to the immortality of prose, descriptions of, or allusions to, scenery which are evidently second-hand, or which are cold, or too explicit, or too formally definite. For the central and essential glory of nature, we know, is in her infinity, and no rendering of her

is likely to be immortal which fails to recognise and suggest infinity.

On the other hand, if over-definiteness and over-explicitness shut out from immortality, so does any sacrifice of clearness to wit and ingenuity. This applies as much to description in prose as we have found that it does to description in poetry. It is difficult to draw any quite satisfactory line between the indefiniteness and suggestiveness which are necessary to render the infinite in nature, and the over-ingenuity which spoils her clearness and simplicity; but the one secures immortality, and the other secures, at best, temporary charm and uncertain appreciation.

Description of scenery in novels may become old-fashioned from lack of proportion. The dominant interest of fiction is human; and, in ideal fiction, nature must be subordinate to human nature. There have been periods, and there are books, in which human interest is (so to say) thinly scattered over what is substantially a rendering of locality and scenery. The chief cause of this, when it happens, is *sentimentalism*; i.e., feeling over-indulged or indulged amiss. Its vogue is likely to be transitory.

One very exceptional treatment of natural scenery in fiction deserves a word to itself in conclusion. With extreme rarity novels have appeared in English of which the essential theme throughout has seemed to be nature rather than human nature, and yet in which the human interest is strong. In such books the characters seem to be, in a quite peculiar sense, *autochthonous*; the reader feels them, and never ceases to feel them, as products of the soil.

“The earth hath bubbles as the water hath,
And these are of them.”

Such novels are so rare that one can hardly think of more than two English writers as having produced them in their most distinctive form, Emily Brontë and Mr. Thomas Hardy. In *Wuthering Heights* the interest, though not realistic, is piercingly human; and yet it would be non-existent apart from the landscape in which it makes itself felt. To remove that landscape would be to remove not a background or surroundings, but foundations and buttresses: the work would be not altered but ruined. And this is even more conspicuously true of some of Mr. Hardy's most characteristic work, e.g., *The Return of the Native*. That book we may almost call a prose-poem about "Egdon Heath"—a place quick in every square yard with mysterious life, which now and again concentrates itself in the throbbing interest of human individuals and groups. And yet, though those characters seem to grow out of the heath like phases of its vegetation, and to come and go on its heights and in its hollows like shadows of the clouds, their life and passions are those of men and women.

Over such peculiar and exceptional fiction it is difficult to believe that fashion has much power. Temporary phases of taste may indeed turn away from such fiction for various reasons; but it is difficult to see how its style could ever be old-fashioned. For its immortality as rendering of landscape is guarded by two sureties: intensity and sincerity.

(4) *Essays and Essayistic Prose*.—The essay is but little subject to the vicissitudes of fashion. It shares poetry's comparative exemption from changes of taste, poetry's characteristic timelessness of expression. Of course, in the essay, as in poetry, the timelessness is not absolute, the exemption is only comparative. Although there is more

than a century between Addison and Charles Lamb, we can hardly say that Addison is more old-fashioned than Lamb; although R. L. Stevenson wrote essays and essayistic prose and wrote them with immediate appreciation and acceptance in his own day towards the close of the nineteenth century, his style, in respect of mere fashion, is hardly more modern than the styles of Addison and Lamb. On the other hand, the style of Bacon's Essays is archaic, more archaic than the style of Addison. Yet even in Bacon's Essays, we shall find, when we look into them very closely, that the expression which we feel to be old-fashioned is so in a superficial rather than a deep sense; that the archaism concerns forms of words such as "discerneth" for "discerns," or small matters of taste such as frequency of Latin quotation, rather than anything in sentence or paragraph. Indeed, if it were otherwise, essays so aphoristic as Bacon's, so dependent on their "wisdom," could hardly be as perennially interesting as they are. They are so brief and sententious, and, in all their statements, go so straight to the point, that if their wisdom is perennial, the essence of the style can hardly fail to be perennial also.

Difference of taste as to modesty and show of learning bring an element of fashion into the essay as into other forms of prose. But its comparative exemption from changes of taste seems to depend largely on (besides its generally egoistic individual and incalculable nature) the frequent presence in it of one or both of two qualities: *quaintness* and humour.

Quaintness is a phase of egoistic individuality, and we say that it is present where unexpected effects of pleasing eccentricity are produced. In a sense, no doubt, we may call old-fashionedness the source of the attractiveness of

the quaint; but it is a sense quite consistent with our account of old-fashionedness in this chapter. For we here regard old-fashionedness, not as that which is charming by its archaism, but simply as that which is archaic, that which we should not wish to write, except, possibly, in deliberate self-conscious adoption or imitation of the archaic. The essayist's quaintness may be old-fashioned and yet transcend fashion. It is, in this matter, with style as it is with costume. The attire of a beefeater or a bishop is old-fashioned, *i.e.*, it was settled centuries ago, and it expresses bygone conceptions of the fitting and significant; but it is also timeless: no beefeater or bishop would wish to be otherwise attired, or probably will be, as long as beefeaters and bishops last. Similarly, the quaintness of Stevenson may recall and perpetuate the quaintness of Lamb, and the oddities of Dr. John Brown the oddities of Burton; and yet, as aspiring essayists, we should be only too proud to win a place in an apostolical succession so evidently above and beyond time.

The quaintness which is so characteristic a feature of the essay, and which thus links the ages together, needs, of course, to be very carefully discriminated. The eccentricity—oddity, if we will—must be *pleasing*, and it must be pleasing as beauty or wit is, by giving deep æsthetic or intellectual satisfaction, not by exciting a pleasure which soon gives way to indifference or distaste. Fundamentally, indeed, we soon come to suspect that the quaintness which gives timelessness to essayistic style is inseparable from humour, at least as an ultimate source. Humour, we know, is hard to define; it is complex, it is subtle, it has wide ramifications. At this stage of our inquiry we must assume that the reader has provided himself with some kind of

definition of humour; that, at all events, he feels that he knows it when he sees it. That being so, we must content ourselves with appealing to him whether the best quaintness of his favourite essayists, the quaintness which helps to make them his living companions, does not come, in the last resort, from that wonderful blend of intelligence and sympathy which, whether it is itself or another self, whether it brings smiles or tears, is a genuine *elixir vitæ* of literature.

(5) *Journalism*.—There are not only analogies, there is organic connexion, between essayistic and journalistic literature, as the pages of our monthly and quarterly reviews amply testify. Yet, in respect of fashion, no two types could be in more dissimilar situations. If the essay proper is much sheltered from the winds of fashion, journalism proper lives in their full blast; or, we may perhaps rather say, that those varying winds are its life-breath. Journalism proper, in fact, is but the articulation of temporary taste, taste in opinion, taste in jest, taste in ethical judgment. The journalist writes of the moment for the moment, and no other writer dares, to no other writer would it be worth while, to do the like.

This intimate *liaison* between journalism and taste is the result of peculiar conditions of modern civilisation, mainly telegraphy and telephony, together with rapid locomotion. Two results are inevitable. (1) The style of journalism is of very great value as an index of fashion in the form of public taste. Nothing could inform us better about the character of taste in any period than those utterances which were sufficiently congenial with it to secure and maintain the success of daily and weekly publications. We see what people thought and liked and preferred reflected in language necessarily artless even when instinctively

rhetorical; and, except in fiction, we can nowhere else see it so well.

(2) No form of literature is so unlikely to be immortal, so unlikely to transcend fashion and be more than a mere mirror and index of taste than mere journalism. For the best journalism has the taint of slavery; and immortal prose is free. Journalism works under two lashes; the lash of popular disfavour, and the lash of controversial necessity. The prose which is to live for ever must dare to be unpopular, and it must soar to or near to the point which sees controversy raging far below. The journalist must please his first readers, for they go to him to be amused or confirmed, not to be really instructed or convinced. The great writer always writes potentially for a boundless posterity, and, in numberless cases, fails, wholly or partially, with his contemporaries. The journalist is forced, by the necessities of the case, to select the greater number of his themes because they divide opinion or taste, and his readers read in combative mood. Immortal prose, however much it may have to deal with controversy, is beyond and above it.

From our present point of view, then, there is little to be said about journalism; for our object in this chapter has been to find canons of distinction between the timeless and the temporary, and journalism is mostly temporary. Three remarks only it seems desirable to make.

When we compare journals of the past with journals of the present we notice (1) great changes in superficial humour. Humour, in its depths, as we have just found, immortalises prose and binds the ages together. But humour of the surface, the humour which is expressed in mere jests, goes out of fashion very quickly.

(2) We find a great decrease in sentimental rhetoric. The age in which we live is by no means without sentimentalism; but it is not rhetorically sentimental in its journalistic style. Much of our policy may be sentimental, and it is of course supported in our journals; but it is not supported by appeals phrased as they would have been phrased, *e.g.*, early in the nineteenth century. It is argumentatively rather than emotionally supported, and tersely rather than copiously.

(3) We notice a great decrease in general pomposity of expression. Not so very long ago, the journalist thought it was his business to report of everything and comment on everything with some grandiloquence. For better or for worse—surely in the main for better—he does not do so now. His measure of many things is truer; his eyes have lost a dazzle which gave no trustworthy light.

In all this we have of course been speaking of *pure* journalism, the journalism of dailies and the greater part of weeklies. That modern product, the review-article, when it is not a kind of treatise or biography, belongs, as we know, for the most part to the essayistic type; and as essay it must be judged.

CHAPTER XI

INDIVIDUALITY

IN this our final chapter we have to deal with what is in one sense the most difficult part of our subject. As I remarked at the beginning of the first chapter, it is a widespread belief that Style is, at least as to its most powerful and distinctive features, a mere manifestation of individuality, and a manifestation of which no true analysis is possible. According to this view all we can say of the Style of a composition is that it is there, that it makes such and such an impression on us. We speak of it as a reality and an important reality; we attach to it, perhaps, certain epithets, generally involving metaphor, in which we express our praise or dispraise; we speak of it perhaps as "supple," "nervous," "frigid," "florid," "colourless," or what not; but we end always by asserting or implying that nothing much more definite can be said about it. And we probably dismiss the subject by reiterating Buffon's well-worn but misconceived dictum: *Le style est l'homme*.

Now the student cannot need to be reminded that that is not the view of this book, else the book could not be in existence. Every chapter, every sentence, is based on the assumption that Style is, to a very large extent, a matter of option; that a writer whether of verse or prose, having several alternative means of expression open to him,

chooses, more or less deliberately, more or less consciously, these rather than those. And, unless the book is a tissue of mere nonsense or irrelevancies, we have surely done something towards justifying our assumption. We believe that there is option in Style; and it is part of this belief that Style may be reasonably regarded and fruitfully treated, not as a mere indivisible and essentially indescribable jet of individuality—a kind of lightning-stroke known only in its effects—but as a series of separable operations through which thought and emotion pass in process of expressional manifestation by intelligence to intelligence.

Yet the other view has its truth, with which in this chapter we must briefly reckon. In the first chapter we frankly said: “The whole of expression, the whole of Style, cannot be analysed or explained.” We compared literary with facial expression; and we said that in both, besides what can be analysed and shown as separable, “there is something, an informing mystery, which cannot be broken up or named, our ignorance of which we indicate by the unsatisfactory word individuality. Nearly all we know about the individuality of a human face or a literary style is that it cannot be reproduced.” With this informing mystery we are now face to face. What is it, and what, in such a book as this, may usefully be said about it?

Is it permissible and helpful to think of it as a *residuum* rather than as an informing spirit? Is it one remaining element among many, distinguished only in that its real nature is hidden from us? Or is it not an element at all but a synthetic principle which makes the elements into a whole?

When we think closely about any literary work, either in poetry or prose, when we think about it as a whole, and

reflect on the impression made upon us by its style, we think of it in terms of individuality. Carlyle's *French Revolution*, e.g., or Browning's *Sordello*, could, we feel, have been written by none other than its author. And when we proceed to analyse the style of either work, and to consider its vocabulary, sentences, paragraphs, figures of speech, and all the rest of it, we surely do not think of its individuality as a *residuum*, as one thing more additional to, and comparable with, the other things. After all our analytic operations as before them, we think of the work as Carlyle's or Browning's, still in the sense that it could have had no other authorship. And we think, surely, of that authorship as a spiritual power regulating the relationship of all the parts we have been analysing, and making them into a whole. In other words, we think of individuality as an informing spirit or synthetic principle rather than as a *residuum*. To quote again from our first chapter:—"The parts separated by the analysis are in works of literary art presented, not separately, but held together in a synthesis and balance—they appear as many in one; and this synthesis and balance, this unity in plurality, is the result of an operation to which only the writer may be competent, and the power to effect which cannot be acquired by any study." We are now, perhaps, in a position to add emphasis to this statement, and to amplify it. As a result of all our researches we find that this synthetic principle is a "creative" or plastic force which makes the composition what it essentially is as this author's work and not another's.

Can we amplify as far as to change the words (in the quotation above) "an operation to which only the writer may be competent" into "an operation to which only the

writer *is* competent"? In other words, can we hold that in every work of literary art there is an informing spirit without which the work could not exist, and which is absolutely individual and incommunicable?

It certainly seems as if literary individuality had infinite gradation of force. Some works of much stylistic merit seem purely imitative or fashionable; many excellent leading articles, *e.g.*, might, we feel, have been written by anybody trained in the best journalistic style of the period. Again, there are well-known works of joint authorship in which it is impossible for the most skilled critic to detect the different hands. In choosing works by Carlyle and Browning we purposely chose from authors with exceedingly marked individuality. What of works in which the individuality is much feebler?

In considering this question we ought to bear one or two things in mind.

(1) There is a risk attendant on all illustration by example, because, for the sake of immediate cogency, the illustrations are made as striking as possible. When, therefore, we are illustrating individuality, we naturally cite from writers whose individuality is marked; and we are in danger of thinking of individuality as always marked in something like the same way.

(2) Yet it is evident on reflection and examination that it is not so. The student soon finds that, in one sense at least, what we are in this chapter calling individuality appears to be a collective rather than an individual quality. He remembers that there is such a thing as what we have already considered under the name of fashion; that there are styles belonging to periods—Caroline style, eighteenth-century style, and so on. Can he, on the whole, avoid the

conclusion that the import of individuality may be easily misconceived, and its importance easily exaggerated? May not resistance to that conclusion lead him into the blunder of thinking that individuality as marked as that of Carlyle or Browning or George Meredith—individuality which can hardly be imitated except by way of parody—is the crowning merit of a writer, and so relapse into the false view against which this book has been written, that style is an inexplicable, incommunicable flavour which only “genius,” and that rarely, can impart?

I have spoken of the misunderstood and misused dictum of Buffon as the classical expression of this view. It may be well to quote here that dictum in its context, so that we may use it as the motto of a truer thesis.

Buffon is maintaining that no works which are not written in a good style will survive. Interest of theme is not enough to secure immortality.

“La quantité des connaissances, la singularité des faits, la nouveauté même des découvertes ne sont pas de sûre garans de l’immortalité. Si les ouvrages qui les contiennent . . . sont écrits sans goût, sans noblesse et sans génie, ils périront, parce que les connaissances, les faits et les découvertes s’enlèvent aisément, se transportent, et gagnent même à être mises en œuvre par des mains plus habiles. Ces choses [les connaissances, les faits et les découvertes] sont hors de l’homme, le style est l’homme même; le style ne peut donc ni s’enlever, ni se transporter, ni s’altérer: s’il est élevé, noble, sublime, l’auteur sera également admiré dans tous les temps; car il n’y a que la vérité qui soit durable et même éternelle. Or, un beau style n’est tel en effet que par le nombre infini des vérités qu’il présente. Toutes les beautés intellectuelles qui s’y

trouvent . . . sont autant de vérités aussi utiles, et peut-être plus précieuses pour l'esprit humain, que celles qui peuvent faire le fond du sujet." ¹

In other words, style is the human element in literary works; that which gives them life and dignity, life and dignity which the worth of the mere subject-matter could not give. It is that power by which truth is presented, not as fact merely, which is dead, but as beauty, which is alive for evermore. It is thus evident that the words *le style est l'homme même* ought not to discourage the student from the analysis and exposition of style. They assert the immortal life of style, not its inexplicable individuality.

Regarding individuality as the synthetic principle which combines the elements of style into unity, it would seem that we ought to admit three grades of it. Most fundamental is the rational architectonic force which regulates and determines all literary expression in all languages and in all ages; which shows itself through individuals and so becomes associated with each of them. Secondly, there is that power of the unification of expressional elements possessed by certain eminent writers, whereby they present their work as a blend so perfect as *apparently* to defy analysis. Such are the writers whom we praise as "seeming to have no style" or a style which is perfectly unobtrusive. This power also we speak of as individuality. Thirdly, there is the obtrusive undeniable individuality of eccentric writers, of which we have already spoken.

When, therefore, the student is dealing with what he calls the individuality of any writer's style, he ought to consider carefully in which of these three senses he uses the

¹ *Discours à l'Académie Française*, 25 août, 1755. (For translation see Appendix.)

word. And in every case he ought to analyse as far as he can, pushing back as far as possible the bounds of the merely inexplicable. He ought to distrust all metaphors and epigrams on the subject, and strive after a perfectly rational conception and lucid explanation of the nature of that likeness which each writer stamps on his work.

As it is, *ex hypothesi*, an "individual" likeness, it would seem that there is, after all, very little to be said about it. Whether the "informing spirit" is vivid or faint, collective or individual, old-fashioned or timeless, it is necessarily "indiscernible," and we can only make assertions about it, and about certain influences which it may reflect. Let us think again of Carlyle's *French Revolution* or *Sordello*; since, by their eccentric individuality, such works give us the most useful kind of illustration we want. When we have analysed as completely as we can the expression of either work, when we have said all that can usefully be said about words, sentences, books, chapters, metre, or what not, we are left face to face with the informing spirit, the individuality which we will call "Carlylism" or "Browningism," the incommunicable somewhat, which cannot be reproduced. How shall we deal with it? What sort of things shall we say about it? Can we speak of it otherwise than epigrammatically or metaphorically? Can we say more than that we like or dislike it?

Surely we can say a good deal more. We can say, for one thing, that Carlylism or Browningism is what it is because Carlyle or Browning was what he was. We may regard—we must regard—the individuality as a display of psychology; and we may profitably try to show how the man's psychology shows in the writer's style. We can consider how far the man wrote under moral, how far under purely

intellectual, influences; how much in his work seems the product of an originality transcending all we can distinguish as education, and how far it is the result of education or circumstances. Finally, we can recur to the important question of fitness from a special point of view, and inquire whether Carlylism or Browningism imposes itself (so to say) injuriously on the subject-matter, or is as objectively true or beautiful as it is subjectively interesting and attractive.

Mutatis mutandis, these would seem to be the kind of reflections we ought to make about the informing spirit, the individual likeness, of every composition. Nor does it appear that the grade of individuality need greatly affect the value of the reflections. If it is feeble, the whole composition may be below the level necessary for our purpose; or the individuality may be feeble only in the sense that it is collective. But collective individuality may be as susceptible of psychological or other illumination as individuality in the most proper sense of the word. *E.g.*, the journalistic style of an anonymous leading article may reflect moral and intellectual influences, may as evidently transcend education or be wholly dependent on it, may colour the subject-matter or only illuminate it, as plainly as the style of Carlyle or Browning.

Such an inquiry, no doubt, has dangers as well as advantages. A good deal of it may or must be guess-work; we may be unable to reach anything like scientific certitude as to many of the matters we discuss. *E.g.*, how can we know the whole of a writer's education, so as to be certain how much his style owes to it, and how much is independent of it? How can we draw a line between the moral and the intellectual, so as to pronounce on what a book derives from character, and what from pure intelligence? All our

discussion of individuality in style, considered as that which cannot be analysed, is beset by the risk of passing into vague dissertation on possible or probable origins, an exercise of little value to the serious student.

Avoiding all such dissertation as carefully as we can, let us, at the conclusion of our task, consider briefly those aspects of individuality in style which we have already indicated, in order to see how they may bear on literary criticism. We are warranted in suggesting to the student the following lines of inquiry and discussion.

I. *Individuality in Style is intellectual.* — We cannot reflect on any literary style worth reflecting on at all, whether in verse or prose, whether the style of a single writer or the prevalent style of a type or period, without recognising that authorship primarily means intelligence. In one sense, of course, this is a platitude; but it is more. Let us summon up, yet again, the style of Carlyle or George Meredith. Whether we like it or not, what is the first thing that we say about it? Surely that it is the style of a writer of unusually high and keen intelligence. Carlyle is (predominantly) an historian and essayist, and Meredith (predominantly) a novelist, and therefore we ought to consider them separately. When we read the *French Revolution* or *Frederick the Great*, we may or may not approve of the version of the events and characters which the book sets before us, but we cannot deny the force and vividness of the version, the force and vividness of a strong and very peculiar intelligence. It is the version of one who has himself reflected deeply on the events and persons of whom he writes, and such reflection is a phase of intelligence. It is the version of one with an unusually vivid power of realisation and portraiture; and such power is equally a

phase, and a rare phase, of intelligence. It is the version, thirdly, of one with a large gift of humour, a gift freely used in the realisation and reproduction of characters and events; and humour is intelligence. Finally, it is the version of a philosopher of history; of one, *i.e.*, with a theory of the universe, apart from which no attempt is made to interpret historical characters and events. And a theory of the universe is evidently a manifestation of very high intelligence.

When we read *The Egoist* or any other of Meredith's novels, we have an even stronger and more irresistible impression of intelligence. We are in communion with a writer who takes a high and serious view of his work as a novelist, who does not in any sense play with it, or execute it languidly or conventionally. Fiction such as Meredith's involves an exertion of intellect with few parallels among novels in any language. It involves above all imagination (to use that difficult word in one of its most legitimate senses). It is quite possible to write novels with no imagination, but not novels such as Meredith's. Some observation, some power of imitation, the reproduction of hearsay, and command of a style popular at the moment, will produce many readable novels; but such novels are without individuality. When we speak of the individuality of *The Egoist*, we mean, first of all, the imagination, *i.e.*, the power of idealisation and of representative exhibition of human character which makes the book remarkable. We mean, *e.g.*, that the hero, as Meredith shows him to us, is, as we say, true to life, or rather (as we may say metaphorically) *really lives* as we read about him. He has a double interest, inasmuch as he illustrates the abstract quality of egoism, and also is himself a vivid egoist, such a vivid egoist,

perhaps, as does not appear elsewhere in fiction. The power of arousing such interest is imagination, which is a phase of intelligence. Then there is much more in Meredith's novels which is the product of intellect or intelligence. There are the comment, the humour, the criticism of life, the feeling for nature; and much besides. All these we feel as part of Meredith's individuality, that in his style which is indiscernible and incommunicable, and inimitable.

We make the same kind of reflection when we pass from eccentric styles to those which cannot be so called; and from styles of single writers to styles of which the individuality is "collective." If the piece of writing is really worth study as literature it will be found to reflect an active intelligence. Fielding and Newman have none of the eccentricity of Carlyle and Meredith; they write with conspicuous self-restraint, and seem to feel the ordinary vocabulary and cadences of the English language adequate to all their needs. Yet our first comment, after reading a few pages of either, would surely be: what admirable intelligence!

The very absence of eccentricity in prose, otherwise so distinguished, we should attribute to intelligence. We should say, here are two writers (dissimilar indeed in very much, yet alike in this) who deal with their respective subject-matters with entire sanity; who know exactly (to use a familiar phrase) "what they are talking about," and how to convey their knowledge, whether it takes the form of shrewd criticism of average human nature, or subtle dialectic on matters of faith, morals, and interpretation of history, with the most satisfying and delightful lucidity to these readers. And similarly with the collective individuality of, *e.g.*, anonymous journalistic and periodical

writing. If it deserves to come within the province of criticism it is certain to manifest intelligence which is first hand, and not a mere echo of intelligence other than that of the writer.

2. *Individuality in Style is moral.*—It may not be, it is not easy to draw any definite line between the intellectual and the moral; for no normal human being can really at any time cease from being both intellectual and moral; all really human significance is ethical as well as intelligent. But the popular distinction between the two is founded on fact—the fact that moral qualities are a special manifestation of man's energy, and may be considered apart. Let us consider them apart in our present inquiry into literary individuality.

Once more let us go first to the eccentrics, to Carlyle and Meredith. In thinking closely of their literary individualities, we soon find ourselves in contact with what we must call moral rather than intellectual qualities. We think of Carlyle as writing always under a keen sense of the difference between right and wrong, a difference regarded by him as founded in the unalterable nature of things. And we think of this as much more than a mere opinion; we feel it as part of the man's very nature, conditioning and colouring everything he says on every subject. We could not begin to write like him, we feel, without sharing his view of the nature and importance of this difference. Again, we think of him as distinguished by his power of sympathy (with its correlative power of antipathy). By sympathy we here mean a consciousness of subject-matter manifesting itself, not as imaginative grasp, but as warmth of feeling, which communicates itself to the reader; and this is moral rather than intellectual.

Again, Carlyle's one-sidedness and exaggerations, his over-praise of one person or policy and overblame of another, we recognise as moral at the expense of pure intelligence. Whether we adopt or repudiate in presentations of, *e.g.*, Cromwell and Frederick, we must at least, as a matter of literary criticism, attribute them to generosity of feeling as distinguished from impartiality of judgment.

The moral aspects of Meredith's style are much less prominent than those of Carlyle's. Meredith is too eminent a master of fiction, too imaginatively in sympathy with all sorts and conditions of human life, to be otherwise than apparently non-moral. He is in this respect very far removed from, *e.g.*, Dickens, in whose novels there is so constant an exhibition of moral preference that we may call his literary individuality quite as much ethical as intellectual. Yet, if Meredith is not in this sense a moral writer, he exhibits, we feel, moral qualities in his style. His humorous sympathy, that quality in him which makes him pre-eminently a master of comedy, is to be thought of as moral. If it is, at first sight, difficult to us to think of it so, that may be because we are apt to ignore the deeper import of humour. We think, easily and naturally, of power over pathos as moral, as a fit expression of sympathy in the writer. But humour, as we find when we probe to its depths, is quite as much an expression of sympathy, of moral feeling as distinguished from mere intellectual insight. And Meredith's humour is always alive with sympathy. Again, Meredith's feeling for nature, the sympathy with landscape and atmosphere which is so frequently breaking forth in his prose, is to a large extent moral. It is the kind of feeling for landscape which we are wont to class as "romantic," and the fact that we

speak of it as "feeling" suggests that we regard it as of an ethical character. It is the kind of estimate of nature which Wordsworth and Shelley in a very real sense introduced into English literature. In Wordsworth its moral character is evident, and it is only less so in Shelley, from the accident of his being a rebel against orthodox society, morality, and religion.

Moral elements are as undoubtedly, if less obtrusively, in more normal styles. It is certainly easy to think of writers, both in prose and verse, who seem to be, comparatively speaking, non-moral; who seem to write as if the world were a phantasmagory, interesting only to the intelligence. But, putting such for the moment aside, we find the most eminent literary styles plainly expressing morality as well as intelligence. We could not fancy ourselves writing like Spenser or Pope or Tennyson without moral training and moral preference. We could not fancy ourselves writing like Byron without moral interests and excitements. The result will be much the same if we survey the whole list of famous prose writers from the earliest to contemporary times. We shall find those styles which are greatest or most significant showing, more or less clearly, the writers to be men living in a moral world, sensitive to its differences, and regulated by its laws. We have seen in our chapter on fashion that what is known as taste varies from age to age. Now, these variations of taste are chiefly moral in character. One broad illustration will show the truth of this. In the prose fiction of Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, the literary taste of the time permitted a kind of explicitness in humour which to the taste of our time is indecent. This change of taste is evidently moral, for it is due to an increase in the moral virtue of modesty. Similarly as

regards many other changes of taste and moral sentiment which are reflected in style.

3. *Individuality in Style is originality.*—We have begun by thinking of the synthetic principle manifested in every writer's style as partly intellectual power and partly moral preference. So far it has shown itself as human rather than personal, generic rather than individual. We come now further within the circle of individuality, and consider style as that which only the writer himself could give us, that which is as wholly underived and inexplicable as his own soul.

Every important style, it is needless to say, has not this quality. We are always tempted to think originality greater than it is. It is only by very intimate knowledge of literature that we can be sure that what to us is striking as well as delightful, what we feel we encounter for the first time, is not really derived and reproduced. And, where there is no conscious art in the matter, there is often subconscious or unconscious influence which determines the differentia of a style. But we are here scarcely thinking of originality from that point of view. By originality we here mean only individuality in its most inexplicable phase—that in a style which makes on us the impression of being underived, which we can only fitly salute with silence or with praise or blame. It does not affect our estimate if it is proved to us that the style is not as wholly underived as we thought. In that case (plagiarism apart) we should class the derivative as a legitimate result of education, and still feel the style as original.

Originality is the chief determinant of the gradation of individuality in style. In this sense eccentricity and originality are almost convertible terms. Almost, but

not quite. We may call Carlyle's or George Meredith's or Browning's style original or eccentric with equal fitness; but there is originality in the styles of, *e.g.*, Tennyson and R. L. Stevenson which we cannot as fitly call eccentricity. It is this latter kind of originality which is chiefly interesting from our present point of view.

What do we mean when we call Tennyson's or Stevenson's or Charlotte Brontë's style original? Not that it shows intelligence or moral sympathy, but simply that it is new or fresh; that it seemed so to contemporaries when the author's works first appeared, and that it seems so still to us when we hear or read them. The novelty and freshness take different forms in each writer; but in every case it is the synthetic principle manifested in the style which seems the new and fresh thing. In Tennyson it manifests itself, we may perhaps say, mainly as a detection of new aspects of beauty. In Charlotte Brontë it is a new command over power and passion. In Stevenson it is the faculty of showing a fresh significance in life, and a new force and beauty in many aspects of things. This power of producing a constant and recurrent sense of novelty it is which, more than anything else, makes us think of such styles as Stevenson's and Tennyson's as *flavours*, and tempts us to fancy that they cannot be analysed or described or even to any extent explained.

Many excellent and first-rate styles seem wanting in this quality of originality as we here understand it. George Eliot's, *e.g.*, has it much less than Charlotte Brontë's: strictly speaking, perhaps, has it not at all. In some cases, and especially in cases of collective individuality, one thinks of the style as a product rather than as a creative force; a product, it may be, of education or of circumstances, or of

intellectual and moral energy, but not distinctively as a new and determining force.

4. *Individuality in Style reflects education and circumstances.*—This is what we are most apt to feel about a style when we are not struck by its originality. We say of it probably: this style does not surprise me by its novelty; I can see where it came from and how it is derived; it is the style of one living in such and such a province, at such and such a period, having been educated in such and such a way; it is English or Scottish or Welsh or Irish; it is Georgian or Victorian; these characteristics of Chaucer are French or Italian; here Milton shows that Spenser was his master; Keats could not have written those lines if he had not been a student of Milton, and so on. The tendency of criticism, especially at the present time, is to make much, often too much, of such derivations of style. Where they do not amount to imitation or plagiarism, and even when they are not, as they often are, conjectural or fantastic, they are always a matter of secondary interest, and ought to be so treated. The basis of all criticism ought to be the assumption that a style is—what it necessarily always purports to be—the author's own, and the disproof of that assumption should be clear and definite.

To many journalistic and periodical styles having collective individuality we can hardly give higher praise than in saying that they are the styles of educated men, reflecting the best thought and emotion of the time (and it may be of the place) in which they were written. This particular merit they share with many styles which are individual in the fullest sense of the word. The style of Shakespeare would not have been what it is if he had not been an Elizabethan; if Marlowe had not been an elder contem-

porary; if there had been no Renaissance and no Italian influence; no Stratford and no London. No literary originality is so transcendent as to be able to dispense with education, or even to disguise its presence and character. No English poet is more original in style than Milton; no poet, every time we read him, seems more novel, fresher, more underived and inimitable; and yet no poet more plainly shows the quantity and quality of his education everywhere: an *advocatus diaboli* might found plausible arguments against his originality on every page. In every case literary individuality, as original or creative, is like the creative force in nature, *au fond* a manifestation of development. The writer receives material in education and from surroundings, and stamps upon it what originality he has, modifying and altering it in the process.

No critical task is harder than adjudication between the claims of originality and education in style. In prose, with its colloquial basis, the task is especially hard. Prose style lies open to every kind of neighbouring influence, soiling and degrading, as well as purifying and ennobling. Fashion is a tyranny at once subtle and severe; foreign models intrude in season and out of season; every avenue is thronged by slang, claiming to be admitted as classical speech. How, in such circumstances, is anything worthy the name of originality of style possible?

The best way of facing the task is to remember how many elements are included in style as we understand it in this book, and through how large a choice of media originality may declare itself. A style may make us feel its novelty and first-hand freshness in spite of derived subject-matter and a diction vulgarised here and there by slang, by virtue of a novel arrangement and balance, and by the fact that

the slang is discriminatingly chosen, and was evidently recognised by the writer as such. Many degrees are possible in the absorption of education; in the best prose writers the absorption may be so complete that what they have learned and derived shows only as native force. Or (as in many essayists deriving more or less from Montaigne), though the tissue of the composition may seem to be not only derived but quoted—an apparent medley of tags and anecdotes—the author may rule over it all, a manifest captain and king.

5. *Individuality may respect or disregard fitness.*—The aspect in which we finally consider the individuality of style is in its relation to what we recognise as the central and all-important question of fitness. About every style deserving the attention of the student he naturally and properly asks:—How does it affect the theme or subject-matter? Does its success consist in the elucidation of the theme, or is the theme a mere pretext and opportunity for the self-display of the style, which may, indeed, give intellectual satisfaction at the expense of the truth or clearness of the theme?

Here, as so often elsewhere, makes itself felt the underlying difficulty expressed in the question—a question we have often put and always evaded:—How far is it possible in literature to separate subject and treatment, theme and exposition, so as to deal with them apart? If we cannot, to some extent at least, so separate them, we can hardly discuss the relation between individuality and fitness at all. For if theme and expression, subject and style, are essentially one, it would seem that the individual must create and impose his own standard of fitness. In poetry, where the difficulty of making the separation is greater than in prose,

it seems as if the individual poet had considerable power in this respect. It seems as if a poet of great genius might innovate arbitrarily and in almost any direction. The contempt for the dramatic unities shown by Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists is but a small instance of a much larger and equally justifiable independence.

"What form is best for poems?

. Trust the spirit,
As sovran nature does, to make the form;
For otherwise we only imprison spirit
And not embody.

. Five acts to make a play.
And why not fifteen? Why not ten? or seven?
What matter for the number of the leaves,
Supposing the tree lives and grows? " ¹

The fitness of epic, lyric, and drama, we feel, have, in a very real sense, been determined by Homer and Milton, by Pindar and Shelley, by Sophocles and Shakespeare; and when a great writer rebels or innovates, his standard will probably float for ages; his heresy will become the orthodoxy of the future.

But we soon see that there are severe limits to this independence. The licence of the poet is liberty in a cage; however irregular his metre, however unprecedented his form, he must be a metrist and formalist if he is to take rank as a great poet. Eccentricity startles and dazzles; but often it does little more. Innovations often turn out, on close inspection, to be results of large movements which carry individuals along in their rush. And in the less formal world of prose it is much the same.

What, let us ask, would be the effect on literature of

¹ Mrs. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Book V.

perfection of form and unswerving loyalty to traditional standards of fitness? Surely it would be the disappearance of individuality; its complete merger in the collective. Would this be a desirable result? Could there under such conditions be any distinction in literature, any real masterpieces in verse or prose?

There are, indeed, works of definite, and, it may be, high literary merit, works like the plays of Racine or of some Elizabethan dramatists; snatches of anonymous lyric; or novels, histories, and essays, which we read with pleasure and admiration, but without any sense of their authorship as a unique manifestation. We read, not indeed for the theme's sake only, else would our appreciation not be properly literary, but for the sake also of the treatment, which we value as form. The "classical" French drama we enjoy, rather than the cunning of Racine; the typical Elizabethan play as a mirror of life; songs which are throbs of the universal heart; fiction in which we find ourselves, rather than another; history or discourse which embodies the research, the criticism, the literary manners of multitudes. These things may be, and are; and yet of even these individuality must be, even when undetected, the hidden salt. The forms, in which individuality seems lost, were made by individuals; and each successful adoption of the form is an individual success. The individuality may die to live; but it lives; and when we believe ourselves to be rejoicing in a form only, we are really in touch with a person. Only, as we have already seen, the informing force of the individuality greatly varies.

On the other hand let us ask: what would be the effect of a complete disregard of those fitnesses which we sum up in the word form? We can only answer: insanity. Form

and fitness are in the nature of things; and the complete rebel against them is a madman. Literature has had, and still has, brainless conventions made to be destroyed. But the great forms of poetry and prose are temples consecrated, not by antiquity only, but by inherent and eternal rightness; and the most soaring or daring originality may realise itself within their walls. Delightful as literary eccentricity often is, perhaps, when it is great, and we cannot lose the feeling of it as eccentricity, it is never quite sane. In the greatest poems and prose works we can think of, works in which there is certainly no lack or abnegation of individuality, there is conspicuous and complete sanity; individuality has no eccentricity; it shows itself as a supreme control, a central repose.

Would the greatest writers (let us ask finally) regard the assertion of individuality as the measure of their success, the crown of their labour? Surely not. That is not the kind of egoism which finds expression in the monumental creations of the spirit. The man of letters is not at his highest moment when he asks wistfully if he will be remembered after he is gone. It is enough literary immortality to have a station in the "choir invisible"; to be a voice in "creation's chorus"; an element, albeit irrerecognisable as such, in the thought that "rolls through all things," and is the life of the world.

APPENDIX

A translation of the Buffon dictum quoted on page 289.

ABUNDANCE of knowledge, strangeness of facts, even novelty of discoveries, will not ensure [literary] immortality. If the works containing these things . . . are written without taste, elevation, and genius, they will perish. Knowledge, facts, discoveries [thus presented] have no stability, they may be taken away and moved about, and may even gain by being wrought up by cleverer hands. They are outside the man; style is the man himself. Style, therefore, is stable; it cannot be taken away or moved or changed; if it is elevated, noble, sublime, the writer will be equally admired in every age. It is only truth which is stable and immortal, and a fine style derives all its merit from the infinite number of truths which it sets forth. All the intellectual beauties which it embodies are truths, as useful as, and perhaps more precious than, those which make up the subject-matter.

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